

Study Cites Lower Death and Injury Rates Among BC Youth

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Fewer BC youth are dying in motor vehicle crashes despite recent incidents of teen street racing, according to a new study. Adolescent deaths from all external causes have declined during the past 20 years, says the report, "Violence in adolescence: injury, suicide and criminal violence in the lives of BC youth." The study was released today by The McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit BC health research organization.

Death rates due to external causes have dropped 68% among BC's youth population over the last two decades. This decline is most dramatic for motor vehicle crashes, but all categories show some improvement, the report says. The study draws from a variety of sources to look at trends in violence, which is broadly defined as all non-medical causes of death and injury, including non-intentional injuries ("accidents"), suicide and intentional trauma related to criminal activity. Youth violence, even in its broadest sense, "is not on the rise in this province," the report says. Most BC teens, it states, "will make it safely into adulthood... Only a small number engage in behaviours that pose serious risks to themselves or others. "

Public concern about youth violence is raised by accounts of school shootings, bullying, street racing and other activities "which promote an image of young people as out of control and lacking in values or compassion," according to the McCreary study. "Such incidents--however real and disturbing--and their prominence in the media obscure the significant gains that have been achieved in improving the general health status of youth."

The report notes that safety legislation and education, as well as behavioural changes among teens, have contributed to the improved death and injury rates. It acknowledges the positive impact of safer vehicles and roadways, increased seat belt and bicycle helmet use, graduated licensing for new drivers and programs to combat drinking and driving. "These changes have helped to create a safer environment," the study says.

Some populations, including Aboriginal youth, youth in government care services and young people who lack strong connections with family and school, were found to have higher rates of death and injury. The report suggests that further reductions in youth violence could be accomplished through prevention strategies targeting young teens, services to address the impact of alcohol and substance use, and programs to meet the needs of specific population groups. Funding for the report was provided by the Mental Health Promotion Unit, Health Canada, and by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development.

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