

Improving Educational Practices: Youth Survey Data

School, Health and Family

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The data presented in this brochure are taken mainly from the 1999 report *Enquête sociale et de santé auprès des enfants et des adolescents québécois*, which was published by the Institut de la statistique du Québec. However, the data were interpreted by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec.

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Introduction

The 1999 *Enquête sociale et de santé auprès des enfants et des adolescents québécois* (survey of children's and teenagers' health and social lives), which was conducted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ), describes the health and well-being of boys and girls who were 9, 13 and 16 years old in March 1999. It also describes many of their characteristics, behaviours, and perceptions with respect to their families, lifestyles, activities and school life. More than 3 000 young people, their parents and the administrations of more than 180 Québec elementary and secondary schools participated in the survey. The high number of young respondents, coupled with the large number and wide range of subjects covered, is a first for a Québec survey.

In May 2002,¹ the ISQ published a detailed report on the above survey and sent a summary of its highlights to all schools in Québec in the fall of that year. This document, published by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, summarizes the report's survey data that are most likely to help school staff better understand and take into account some of the phenomena affecting youth.

It is intended mainly for the staff of secondary schools targeted by the intervention strategy *New Approaches, New Solutions*, who want to understand students better so that they can create a profile of their situation and examine it. It is likely to interest people involved in assessing the needs of young people, of professional development, and of planning and following up on success plans. The document is also addressed to auxiliary services staff, those who work in collaboration with schools and families or with at-risk children, as well as teaching staff who want to improve their professional practice.

We have attempted to verify the extent to which the phenomena measured by the ISQ survey are linked to the socioeconomic background or type of family young people come from. It was not always possible to do this, since this was not one of the objectives of the survey. Moreover, since this document is intended mainly for secondary school staff, we have placed more emphasis on the results for teenagers; however, we have decided to retain data on 9-year-old children in order to better understand how certain phenomena develop.

Because of the large number of subjects covered in this survey and the large number of statistics involved, the data were first selected, and then reorganized into three sections. **The first section deals with the school environment, the second discusses the students' physiological and psychological health, and the third is concerned with the family environment and some of the activities students pursue outside of school.** For each section, the main results are presented briefly and then, in some cases, commented on with reference to the results of other surveys. Next, a few discussion questions are proposed to provide food for thought and provoke analysis in the school environment. Note that these questions are proposed solely to provoke discussion and do not call for a single or prescriptive answer. Finally, the two appendixes give a few details on the methodology of the ISQ survey.

1. J. Aubin et al, *Enquête sociale et de santé auprès des enfants et des adolescents québécois*, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2002.

To facilitate reading, we have kept the numerical data presented to a minimum. We have nonetheless produced three booklets that explain in detail the data selected by means of tables or graphs and contain other methodological notes. These three booklets, then, are supplements to the summary brochure to which the reader can refer if necessary.²

Clearly a survey of this type, however large in scope, has limitations. First, it was not specifically designed to address the concerns of the educational community; some of the data are therefore not as specific or detailed as one would hope. Nor was its purpose to illustrate the differences between youth living in an urban environment and those in a rural environment. Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds were not singled out for special attention, and some correlations concerning them could neither be confirmed nor invalidated. Some readers will find that the data presented simply confirm the observations they make on an everyday basis. Beyond the statistics, the reality involves meeting young people on their own ground, listening to their striking stories and helping them to solve problems and exercise patience in their relationships with others, which can sometimes make all the difference.

2. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, S. Roy, *Pour améliorer les pratiques éducatives : des données d'enquête sur les jeunes, fascicule d'accompagnement n° 1: Milieu scolaire des jeunes*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation; *Pour améliorer les pratiques éducatives : des données d'enquête sur les jeunes, fascicule d'accompagnement n° 2: État de santé des jeunes*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation; *Pour améliorer les pratiques éducatives : des données d'enquête sur les jeunes, fascicule d'accompagnement n° 3: Milieu familial et activités des jeunes*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003.

1. How do young people live and how well do they perform at school?

The school environment is the place where young people learn, become aware of responsibilities and become integrated into society. The general atmosphere at school and in class, the teachers' commitment, the availability of human and physical resources, the quality of educational practices and programs and the ties between school and families are all factors that determine whether young people like school and persevere and do well in their studies. For several years, a large number of schools have launched, with the collaboration of parents and community organizations, innovative projects to enhance the atmosphere at school and in the classroom, improve relations with students, provide more support to at-risk students and diversify educational practices to ensure that young people succeed.

In disadvantaged areas, because of the more difficult conditions in which young people and their families live, school staff are confronted with problems that manifest themselves more intensely than in other settings: students dropping out and failing at a higher rate and often at an earlier age, lack of motivation, absenteeism and violence. Every year, a large number of young people leave secondary school with no diploma or qualifications. According to data recently released by the Ministère, this phenomenon is much more common in disadvantaged areas (36.6%) than in privileged areas (19.6%³). Many young dropouts later re-enroll in adult education in the hope of obtaining a diploma, though this is not true for everyone; in 2000-2001, 19.3% of 19-year-olds did not have a Secondary School Diploma and no longer attended school⁴. According to the International Adult Literacy Survey, there are large discrepancies between provinces in the reading skills of Canadian youth aged 16 to 25 from disadvantaged backgrounds⁵. Differences in the quality and performance levels of the school systems could largely account for these discrepancies.

Moreover, studies illustrate the differences between boys' and girls' progress in and attitudes toward school, which manifest themselves more acutely in disadvantaged areas⁶. Throughout Québec, almost twice as many boys as girls, not only at the pre-school level but in elementary and secondary schools as well, experience adjustment or learning difficulties⁷. In 2000-2001, it was reported that 24% of 19-year-old male non-graduates were no longer studying, compared to 14% of girls of the same age⁸. According to a brief issued by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, these differences are significant and persistent enough to warrant attention, and the necessary remedial measures should be taken. The Conseil recommends that educational interventions be diversified, taking into account the gender-differentiated effects of the social roles assigned to boys and girls, with

3. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *New Approaches, New Solutions: Fostering Success for Secondary School Students In Disadvantaged Areas* (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002), p. 3.

4. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction des statistiques et des études quantitatives, *Indicateurs de l'éducation: éditions 2002* (Québec: 2002), p. 59.

5. J. Douglas Willms, *Literacy Skills of Canadian Youth*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada (catalogue no. 89-552-MPF, no. 1), Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1997.

6. J.P. Terrail, "La supériorité scolaire des filles," in É. Bautier, S. Boulot and D. Royzon-Fradet, and coll. (ed), *La scolarisation de la France, Critique de l'état des lieux* (Paris: La Dispute, 1997), p. 37-52.

7. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *A New Direction For Success: Adapting Our Schools To the Needs Of All Students* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec), 1997.

8. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Indicateurs de l'éducation: éditions 2002*, 2002, p. 59.

special attention devoted to the difficulties boys experience in the language of instruction and more meaning given to the learning done in class⁹.

In this section, the key ISQ survey results pertaining to the school environment are presented¹⁰. First, the preventive actions and services offered in the schools attended by the students surveyed are outlined. Next, young people's perception of the atmosphere at their schools and how confident they are of succeeding are described. This is followed by a discussion about their self-esteem, repetition of a school year and their perceptions of their educational achievements. Finally, certain phenomena associated with violence in schools are highlighted, and the section concludes with a discussion about young people's academic and career aspirations¹¹.

What the survey reveals about the school environment

1.1 Preventive services and actions in schools

- According to the school administrations surveyed, the services schools provide to most young people in all three age groups are school psychology, nursing, social work, special education and special events. Services such as guidance counselling, extracurricular activities and sports practice are offered more to secondary school students, while other services, such as speech therapy-audiology and remedial instruction, are offered mainly to elementary school children.
- About 5% of 13-year-olds say they have seen a guidance counsellor since the start of the school year, with girls and boys in equal proportions. At age 16, the proportion rises to 26%, and is higher among girls (30%) than boys (21%).
- About 13% of teenagers have seen a nurse during the year. At age 16, this proportion is higher among girls (18%) than boys (8%) and higher as well among young people whose mothers do not have a Secondary School Diploma (19%).
- Moreover, an estimated 9% of 13- and 16-year-olds say they have availed themselves of the services of a psychologist or social worker, with equal numbers of boys and girls. Among 9-year-old children, more boys than girls have used these services, with a proportionately greater number of young people from low-income backgrounds having repeated a year.
- According to the school administrations, the preventive actions most frequently adopted in elementary and secondary schools alike target violence. Actions focusing on diet are more common in elementary schools, while actions aimed at preventing smoking are more common in secondary schools. Nonetheless, some of the less common preventive actions take place in more than half of

9. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *Pour une meilleure réussite des garçons et des filles* (Sainte-Foy: Gouvernement du Québec), 1999.
10. For more information on the findings presented in this section, see Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de la recherche et de l'évaluation, S. Roy et al, *Pour améliorer les pratiques éducatives : des données d'enquête sur les jeunes, fascicule d'accompagnement n° 1: Milieu scolaire des jeunes* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec), 2003.
11. Note that the data on the school environment were collected solely from students attending school; young people of the same age who had already dropped out and often have more difficulties at school, were not surveyed.

elementary schools and in close to three quarters of secondary schools attended by the students surveyed: these actions focus on combating discrimination or sexual harassment.

1.2 Perception of the school atmosphere and self-confidence at school

- Teenagers' perceptions of the school atmosphere were assessed on the basis of their answers to questions about how they feel about school, the availability of teachers and their role in the organization of extracurricular activities or decisions made concerning school regulations. An index was then constructed based on these statements to give an overall appraisal of young people's perception of the school atmosphere. The survey results show that about 87% of 13- and 16-year-old students have a positive perception of the school atmosphere. At age 16, this perception is more widespread among girls than boys, while no difference is noted among 13-year-olds in this area. Thus, a little more than 90% of teenagers report they feel comfortable at school and a similar proportion of them say they are given responsibilities in the organization of extracurricular activities.
- No significant correlation is observed between family income or the mother's education and a positive perception of the school atmosphere. In other words, most teenagers, regardless of their socioeconomic background or their mothers' education, say they feel comfortable at school.
- Nine-year-old children were asked whether they "like to go to school." About 43% of them replied yes, while a similar percentage reported they like school "to some extent." Finally, 15% of 9-year-old children say they do not like going to school. Far more 9-year-old boys say they do not like to go to school than girls of the same age (24% versus 6%).
- **Moreover, in all three age groups, about nine students out of ten say they feel confident about their prospects of doing well at school, with equal numbers of boys and girls.** However, one in five teenagers and 16% of 9-year-old children say they are not doing very well at school. Moreover, 29% of 13-year-olds and 21% of 16-year-olds think they will fail at least two school subjects.
- **During adolescence, a higher proportion of boys than girls say they are not doing very well at school.** Moreover, two thirds of boys consider themselves more capable outside of school, which is the case with 43% and 44% of 13- and 16-year-old girls.

1.3 Self-esteem

- The ISQ survey also attempted to assess young people's self-esteem. According to the definition retained for the survey, self-esteem is supposed to account for how much importance they attach to abilities as well as how they perceive and rate their own competencies. Québec programs aimed at preventive action and

promoting mental health often cite self-esteem as a protective factor. The survey reveals that about one in four teenagers has low self-esteem.

- **Higher proportions of boys, both at age 13 and at age 16 have high self-esteem.** Therefore, a greater proportion of 16-year-olds from privileged backgrounds have a high level of self-esteem; for 13-year-olds, the same trend is seen.
- At age 9, boys and girls seem to perceive self-esteem in similar ways. Moreover, 9-year-olds' self-esteem is associated with their parents' education.
- For young people in all three age groups, self-esteem is also associated with emotional support from parents and the number of sources of support they say they can count on should a problem arise.

1.4 Repetition of a school year and perception of educational achievements

- According to the survey, nearly 10% of 9-year-olds have already repeated a year of studies; this is the case with 19% of 13-year-olds and one quarter of 16-year-olds.
- **The results of the ISQ survey show that repetition of a school year tends to be more common among children living with a single parent in a low-income family, as well as among children whose mothers do not have a Secondary School Diploma.** The survey also shows that a greater proportion of students who have repeated a year have low self-esteem.
- According to the data from the Ministère, the annual proportion of students who repeated a year in 2000-2001 was 3.3% at the elementary level and 8.2% in secondary school. Secondary I, which is the grade that includes the 13-year-olds covered by the survey, has an annual repetition rate of 14%, which is higher than in all other grades. One of the objectives of education reform is to reduce repetition rates; between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, the repetition rate at the elementary level dropped from 4% to 3.3%¹².
- Although no significant correlation between repetition of a year and gender can be inferred from the ISQ survey, the Ministère's statistics show that at both the elementary and secondary levels, more boys than girls repeat a year: in 2000-2001, the repetition rate for boys in Secondary I was 16.8% while for girls, it was 10.8%.
- Concerning educational achievements in the language of instruction, more than one out of four 13-year-olds and nearly one third of 16-year-olds consider themselves to be above average. More girls have this opinion than boys, both at age 13 and at age 16.
- According to a Canadian survey, young people's opinion of their school performance is strongly correlated with the degree of satisfaction with school

12. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Indicateurs de l'éducation: édition 2002*, p. 60.

and with relationships with parents. Therefore, the more positive an opinion they have, the better their relationships with their parents are and the more satisfied they are with school¹³.

- In the spring of 2000, as part of the first survey of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) nearly 5 000 15-year-old students from 165 Québec schools were evaluated on their reading skills. The reading skills assessment was conducted in 32 countries, including 28 that are members of the Organization For Economic Cooperation And Development (OECD). Québec students were in second place; only Alberta students were ahead of them. The results for Québec are comparable to those for Finland, British Columbia, New Zealand, Australia and Korea, but slightly higher than those for the United Kingdom, Japan, Sweden and France¹⁴. In Québec, as in all the participating countries, girls generally outperformed boys by a wide margin¹⁵.

1.5 Violence in the school environment

- For several years, taxing, bullying and verbal and physical violence have plagued the world of education and been the subject of considerable media coverage. A range of programs or activities aimed at preventing violence has been set up in many schools, both to equip teaching staff and to educate or help students. According to analyses of the situation in several countries, the various forms of violence would require better data collection methods to help distinguish feelings of insecurity from real manifestations of violence, since one does not automatically lead to the other.
- According to the results of the ISQ survey, most children and teenagers are never afraid on the way to school. However, a small proportion of children and teenagers feel unsafe; this is the case with 9% of 13-year-olds and 5% of 16-year-olds, but for 9-year-old children, the proportion rises to 22%. Girls aged 9 and 13 feel safer than boys of the same age.
- **The experience of having been the victim of at least one act of verbal or physical violence at school since the start of the school year decreases with age;** 46% of 13-year-olds and 25% of 16-year-olds report at least one experience of victimization at school. Among 9-year-old children, two thirds have been victimized.
- The experiences of victimization young people admitted to most often are: being called names, being threatened with being punched or having their property destroyed and being punched or pushed violently.
- There is a correlation between feelings of insecurity on the way to school and experiences of victimization among 9- and 13-year-olds. The more students have been the target of incidents of aggression or violence at or on the way to school, the more unsafe they feel.

13. A.J. King et al, *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth*, Ottawa, Health Canada, 1999, 110 p.

14. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Indicateurs de l'éducation: édition 2002*, p. 92.

15. Organization for economic cooperation and development, *Knowledge and skills for life: First results from the OECD Program for International Student Assessment*, Paris, 2001, p. 134.

- About 10% of 9-year-old children, with as many boys as girls, report they have been a victim of taxing since the start of the school year, compared to 2% of 13-year-olds and 1% of 16-year-olds.
- **Moreover, at ages 13 and 16, more than one teenager out of ten say they have carried a weapon on their person (for example, a knife, chain or punch) for a six-month period.** This situation is reported more by boys than girls.
- According to a Québec survey of more than 16 000 elementary and secondary school students, 11% report they have been victims of taxing; for three quarters of them, this occurred only once. Furthermore, one in four say they have witnessed at least one taxing incident, and 6% reveal they have already been tempted to tax or have taxed other students¹⁶.
- Moreover, a Canadian survey of mostly 10- and 11-year-old children and teenagers reports that students who harass their peers are generally older than the others and tend to have difficulties in school. For all grades combined, many more boys than girls report they have harassed their peers. In 1994 and 1998, the proportion of Secondary II and IV students who said they have harassed others has increased, though the proportion of grade 6 boys has decreased¹⁷.

1.6 Academic and career aspirations

- In Québec secondary schools, in view of the curriculum reform and the disappearance of career decision-making courses, the need to improve and adapt career awareness activities and educational and career guidance and integrate them into all the other student activities is increasingly being recognized. The concept of the guidance-oriented school, which promotes a variety of activities to facilitate career guidance and educational and career awareness, is eliciting a lot of interest in a large number of school environments¹⁸.
- The results of the ISQ survey show that two thirds of 13-year-olds and three quarters of 16-year-olds plan to do postsecondary studies. In both age brackets, more girls plan to pursue postsecondary studies than boys.
- About 15% of students at age 13 and age 16 are not thinking of continuing their studies after they obtain their Secondary School Diploma (SSD) or Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) (more boys than girls).
- According to data from the Ministère, 16.7% of young people under 20 were enrolled in vocational training programs in 2000-2001. Close to two thirds of these students (60%) already had a Secondary School Diploma. For several years, vocational training programs have drawn more boys than girls¹⁹.

16. M.M.Cousineau, S. Gagnon and L.M.Bouchard, *Les jeunes et le taxage au Québec*, report presented to the Ministère de la Sécurité publique, working paper, 2002.

17. A. J. King et al, *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth*, Ottawa, Health Canada, 1999.

18. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *A New Direction for Success: The Guidance-Oriented School: an Evolving Concept*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2000.

19. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Indicateurs de l'éducation: édition 2002*, p. 54.

- **Moreover, young people's academic or career aspirations are associated with income of their families, so that a lower proportion of young people in low-income families want to do postsecondary studies**, which is also true for young people with low self-esteem. Finally, half as many young people who have repeated a year as those who have not plan to pursue postsecondary studies.
- The economic, social and individual benefits of postsecondary studies are well established. It has been noted that since 1990 the increase in the number of jobs has been especially beneficial for workers who have completed part or all of their postsecondary or university studies, while fewer jobs are available for those who have no diploma or have only a Secondary School Diploma.²⁰
- Studies also demonstrate the influence of the family on young people's educational development: household income and parents' education are still constant, dominant factors in access to postsecondary studies. The more educated parents are and the higher their income, the greater the chances will be that their children will pursue studies at college or university. Studies show, however, that level of education appears to have a greater impact than income; therefore, young adults whose parents had completed postsecondary studies but have low income were more likely to continue their studies than those whose parents had a high income but had not completed postsecondary studies²¹.

Discussion questions for the stakeholders

- What efforts are being made to make the atmosphere at school more pleasant and stimulating for young people (e.g. introducing cultural, sports and community activities during and after class hours: Internet café, physical and sports activities, reading clubs, improvisation league, cultural tours, inviting artists and scientists to school, mural contests in the school, school radio, community newspaper)?
 - How do you rate their relevance and effectiveness? What role do students play in choosing and organizing these activities? How could the situation be improved?
- Does the school strive to promote more meaningful relationships between teaching staff and students (e.g. measures to make the adults more available for students or to promote greater stability in the class)?
- What preventive actions are being introduced to counter some of the forms of violence that occur at school (e.g. verbal and physical violence, teasing, racism, homophobia, violence toward girls) and thereby reduce the feeling of insecurity that some students experience?
- Has the school adopted certain procedures for welcoming, training and supervising students in order to ease the stress of being promoted from elementary to secondary school or being moved from a special class to a regular class?

20. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Indicateurs de l'éducation: édition 2002*, p. 118.

21. See Tamara Knighton, "Postsecondary participation: Effects of parents' education and household income," *Education Quarterly Review*, vol. 8, n° 3, 2002, p. 25-32.

- What do we know about the academic and career aspirations of the students attending the school? How could this be checked?
- To what extent has the school adopted a guidance-oriented approach and developed methods of promoting a better orientation for students in their life projects (e.g. incorporating educational and career guidance into courses, holding career guidance activities as soon as young people enter secondary I, holding meetings with guidance counsellors, a forum on the job prospects in the region in collaboration with socioeconomic partners, activities that encourage entrepreneurship, visits to workplaces)?
- What items reported in the survey on young people's school environment warrant a more in-depth study or could be the subject of a professional development activity?

In General

- What is the current situation with respect to:
 - Learning, motivation (e.g. feeling of competence, value attached to learning)?
 - Students' difficulties in each class or cycle with each subject offered?
- What other problems are encountered in the school environment (e.g. repetition, absenteeism, dropping out, social skills, young people's health, school atmosphere)?
- How could this type of data be obtained?
- What forms of preventive actions, services and support have been put in place?
- How do you rate their relevance and effectiveness? How could the situation be improved?

2. Young people's health

This section draws up a profile of the health of Québec youth at ages 9, 13 and 16. As the *Groupe de travail pour les jeunes*²² has amply demonstrated, good physical and psychological health is essential for the harmonious development of young people and is therefore a determining factor in their ability to perform well at school. Young people's health and well-being are conditioned by a host of factors (individual, family, social and economic) that act simultaneously. Thus, poor diet, tense relationships with family or friends, the separation or divorce of parents, a lack of physical activities, the use of cigarettes, drugs or alcohol, compulsive gambling, violent behaviours in their immediate circle, as well as poverty and insecurity in the family, are all factors that can disrupt not only their mental and emotional balance, but their overall development as well.

For several years there has been a consensus in Québec society that health and welfare interventions should be considered from a standpoint of prevention and of consultation among the institutions and organizations that play a role in young people's lives, especially the school environment. Studies have also shown that in the areas of preventive action and health promotion, approaches based essentially on readings, formal lectures or using leaflets are relatively ineffective; on the contrary, a sustained, direct intervention in which young people and their parents play an active part leads to more tangible results.

The *Priorités nationales de santé publique*, issued in 1997 by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, recommends that more than half of schools should have integrated programming in the health and social services field dedicated to reinforcing certain personal and social behaviours in young people and advocating an environment that is conducive to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle²³.

Education reform should also contribute to a better integration of the issues affecting health and well-being in the school environment. Indeed, the new *Québec Education Program* designates health and well-being as one of the five broad areas of learning, which address a range of issues that concern youth. They are focal points that promote integrated learning and sustained interventions for the entire duration of secondary school. In the same way as the other broad areas of learning outlined in the *Québec Education Program*, health and well-being comprise a vast space for reflection that extends beyond the subject matter and calls for complementary educational interventions. In terms of health and well-being, the general objective of the new program is to encourage the student to become more responsible by adopting a sound lifestyle in terms of health, safety and sexuality. In learning activities and learning situations associated with health and well-being, it is hoped that the students will acquire a greater awareness, not only of themselves and their basic needs, but also of how the choices they make, especially those pertaining to diet, physical activity, sexuality and managing their stress and emotions, will affect their health and well-being. Finally, the emphasis will be on adoption of an active lifestyle and safe behaviour. In short, the school's responsibility toward young people's health goes far beyond the physical education program and calls for concerted action on the part of all staff, in collaboration with parents and partners in the community.

22. C. Bouchard et al, *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*, report of the Groupe de travail pour les jeunes, Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Direction des communications, 1991.

23. Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, *Priorités nationales de santé publique*, 1997-2002.

In this section, we present data on how young people perceive their health and on their breakfast habits. Next will follow a discussion on the physical activities young people engage in, excess weight, obesity and perception of body image will be presented. Next, data on the use of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs will be presented. Some items concerning psychological distress and suicidal thoughts will also be touched on briefly. Finally, some of the data on teenagers' sexuality will be reported²⁴.

What the survey reveals about young people's health

2.1 Perception of health

- Less than half of teenagers consider themselves to be in excellent health (**about 47% and 43% of 13- and 16-year-olds**); **the proportion climbs to 65% for 9-year-old children. A higher proportion of 16-year-olds than the younger students describe their health as “not very good”.**
- Teenager girls have more negative perceptions of their health than boys of the same age; the divergences are especially large among 16-year-olds. Thus, 33% of teenager girls consider themselves to be in excellent health, compared to 52% of adolescents of the same age. No difference between 9-year-old boys and girls is noted concerning perception of health.
- In all three age groups, the students' perception of their health varies in accordance with other factors related to their mental health. Thus, a lower proportion of young people who consider themselves to be in excellent health show signs of psychological distress or serious emotional disorders. Furthermore, a higher proportion of 16-year-olds who have high self-esteem or receive strong emotional support from their fathers or mothers consider themselves to be in excellent health.

2.2 Breakfast

- Nearly two thirds of teenagers consume a food or beverage every school day in the morning before beginning their school activities. The proportion of young people who eat breakfast every school day is higher in 9-year-olds than in the other age groups (80%).
- Among 13-year-olds, a higher proportion of boys than girls eat breakfast every morning; among 9-year-olds, the situation is reversed. Among 16-year-olds, there is no correlation between gender and how often they eat breakfast.
- All field studies and observations confirm that children who skip breakfast in the morning have more difficulty concentrating at school and finding the energy they need to learn. **About 10% of 13- and 16 year-olds and 5% of 9-year-olds say they never eat breakfast before beginning their school activities.**

24. To obtain more information on the findings presented in this section, see S. Roy, *Pour améliorer les pratiques éducatives : des données d'enquête sur les jeunes, fascicule d'accompagnement n° 2: État de santé des jeunes*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2003.

- More young people aged 9 and 13 who live in low-income families or who experience food insecurity skip breakfast than in other groups (this correlation is not observed among 16-year-olds). In all three age groups, a lower proportion of students who have repeated a year eat breakfast than those who have not repeated a year. Among teenagers, a lower proportion who have a worse perception of their educational achievements in the language of instruction eat breakfast.

2.3 Physical activities

- Studies show that by engaging in physical activities, young people promote their health, both now and later on in their adult lives, by reducing the risk of chronic illnesses whose symptoms begin to appear in childhood, especially cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis²⁵. A brief issued by the Kino-Québec scientific committee recommends that every day or almost every day, at school, at home or outdoors, all children and teenagers should do a variety of physical activities that are smoothly integrated into their lifestyles: sports, structured exercise regimen and physical education, as well as walking and recreation. The brief also states that they should do physical activities of moderate or high intensity for at least 20 minutes, three or more times a week²⁶.
- About two thirds of 13- and 16-year-old boys say they have engaged in a physical activity for at least 15 minutes seven or more times during the week prior to the survey, including the physical education course; this corresponds to a “high or very high” level of physical activity. This is the situation for 55% of 13-year-old girls and for 44% of 16-year-old girls.
- In all three age groups, a higher proportion of boys than girls are physically active. **Girls engage less in physical activities as they grow older, while with boys the proportion remains constant.**
- Irrespective of the age group, some activities seem to be engaged in more by boys: basketball, hockey, downhill skiing, snowboarding and soccer. Girls prefer classical and jazz ballet and swimming.
- Little variation in the level of physical activity among youth is noted based on household income or family environment.
- Data from the Canadian longitudinal survey on children reveal that in 1994, more than 60% of children aged 4 to 11 from very poor families had never participated in organized sports, versus 28% of children from privileged areas. According to the survey authors, the main obstacles to their participation are the

25. A. J. King et al, *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth*, Ottawa, Health Canada, 1999, 110 p.
(http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/hbsc_01_e.html)

26. KINO-QUÉBEC, *L'activité physique, déterminant de la santé des jeunes*, Brief presented to the Kino-Québec scientific committee, Québec, Secrétariat au loisir et au sport, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2000.

high cost of organized sports, lack of participation of adults and lack of community recreational facilities in the poorest neighbourhoods²⁷.

- According to other researchers, various factors are linked to the types of physical activities teenagers engage in, especially ethnic origin, the fact of being a male, not being depressed, participating in community recreation and having the support of parents and relations²⁸. Surveys conducted on adults point to a correlation between the socioeconomic indicators of education and income and the pursuit of physical activities²⁹. Among young people, however, research seems to show that differences based on socioeconomic groups are observed more in the choice of physical activities as such³⁰.

2.4 Excess weight, obesity and perception of body image

- In all three age groups, about 15% of boys and girls are considered overweight (3 to 4% are obese, depending on age, and 11 to 13% are somewhat overweight). On the other hand, about 5% of young people are underweight.
- A higher proportion of overweight youth have a parent who is also overweight. This correlation is significant among all young people, regardless of age or gender.
- **The older they get, the more young people report they are dissatisfied with their body image.** Thus, the proportion of young people who are satisfied with their body image is 55% at age 9, 42% at age 13 and 40% at age 16.
- A large number of young people try to change their appearance. This is the case with about 60% of teenagers and 45% of 9-year-olds. Proportionally more girls than boys attempt to lose weight, while boys are more inclined to want to gain weight, in all three age groups.
- For children and teenagers, satisfaction with body image is linked to self-esteem, psychological distress, especially for teenage girls, and perception of health.
- A comparison of the results of the ISQ survey with those of the Canada Fitness Survey conducted in 1981 confirms an increase in excess weight and obesity among Québec youth. This problem is coupled with a high rate of dissatisfaction with body image, especially in teenage girls. Researchers reported that by analyzing the survey results, they were able to identify three objectives that should be pursued in interventions with young people: to reduce or stabilize the prevalence of excess weight, to promote a healthy relationship with body image

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27. Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, Which Family Characteristics Make the Most Difference in Children's Success in School?, Applied Research Bulletin, Special Edition on Child Development, Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, 1999, p. 10-11.
28. J.F. Sallis, J.J. Prochaska and W.C. Taylor, "A review of correlates of physical activity of children and adolescents," *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, vol. 32, 2000, p. 963-975.
29. US Department of Health and Human Services, *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Atlanta, GA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health, 1996.
30. J.F. Sallis et al, "Ethnic, socioeconomic and sex differences in physical activity among adolescents," *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, vol. 49, 1996, p. 125-134.

and to assist parents in their role in order to help achieve the first two objectives³¹.

2.5 Use of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs

- **Nine percent of 13-year-olds and 31% of 16-year-olds smoke.** Between the ages of 13 and 16 the rise in tobacco use is especially pronounced among everyday smokers, jumping from 5 to 23%. At 16, more girls smoke than boys (34% versus 27%).
- Over a 12-month period, about three quarters of 16-year-olds report they have consumed alcohol; of this number, 20% have consumed it every week. Among 13-year-olds, roughly one in four has consumed alcohol in the previous twelve months.
- Among 16-year-olds, a greater proportion drink alcohol every week and consume five or more glasses on occasion than do 13-year-olds. Among 16-year-olds, boys drink more alcohol than girls, both in terms of frequency and quantity of alcohol on each occasion. Among 13-year-olds, the differences between boys and girls are not significant.
- **With 16-year-olds as with 13-year-olds, there appears to be no correlation between household income and either the frequency of alcohol consumption or the number of drinks taken per occasion.**
- Several studies have shown a rise in drug and alcohol use among youth since the early 1990s. According to another ISQ survey conducted in 2000 on 5 000 young people in all secondary school grades, 6% have a problem with drugs or alcohol, especially hard drugs, while 13% are at risk for such a problem. Boys outnumber girls in both these risk categories. Alcohol and drug abuse has harmful consequences for young people, such as overspending, delinquent acts and disruption of family relations, and could require a specialized drug addiction treatment³².

2.6 Psychological distress and suicidal thoughts

- Roughly 22% of 13-year-olds and 19% of 16-year-olds have a high level of psychological distress. They have a less positive perception of the support they could receive from the people around them. Even though more people in these age groups confide in someone, they are still more dissatisfied with the support they received. A little less than one of third of teenagers experiencing a high level of psychological distress report they consulted a health professional to discuss it within a 12-month period.

31. M. Ledoux, L. Mongeau and M. Rivard, "Poids et image corporelle," *Enquête sociale et de santé auprès des enfants et des adolescents québécois*, Institut de la statistique du Québec, Collection la santé et le bien-être, Québec, Chapter 14, 2002, p. 311-336.

32. J. Loiselle and B. Perron, *L'alcool, les drogues, le jeu: les jeunes sont-ils preneurs?*, Enquête québécoise sur le tabagisme chez les élèves du secondaire 2000, volume 2, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2002.

- **More girls than boys have a high level of psychological distress. No correlation is noted between the level of psychological distress teenagers experience and the family environment.**
- Serious suicidal thoughts affect 7% of 13-year-olds and 10% of 16-year-olds. Most teenagers who say they have suicidal thoughts report they have confided in friends more than half the time. Only 23% of 13-year-olds and 16% of 16-year-olds who have had suicidal thoughts say they have seen a health professional. Furthermore, it was noted that girls have more suicidal thoughts than boys, both at age 13 and at age 16.
- In Québec, suicide prevention is a priority, both for the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and for the many organizations that operate in the mental health field. The data of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux show that even though boys from ages 15 to 19 have a mortality rate from suicide five times greater than girls in the same age group, girls attempt suicide twice as often³³.
- Moreover, as parents report, one out of every four 9-year-old children has a serious emotional disorder; the proportion of boys tends to be higher than that of girls. The proportion of 9-year-olds with serious emotional disorders tends to be higher among children not living with both their parents and, generally, among children who have a parent with a high level of distress. Suicidal thoughts affect 8% of 9-year-old children, boys just as much as girls.
- In all three age groups a correlation has been noted between suicidal thoughts and low self-esteem, a low level of emotional support from parents and fewer sources of support from others in their community.
- Suicide among youth in general, and suicide attempts among girls in particular, are very disturbing, unsettling phenomena that call for urgent, concerted interventions, as the Québec suicide prevention strategy attests. From a preventive standpoint, it is recommended that young people's development and social adjustment should be promoted throughout their pre-school and school development. Actions oriented to collaboration with the family environment and parents are encouraged. Thus, in view of the importance of friends as a source of support for young people, the strategy for taking action against suicide takes up a recommendation of the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse, which is that the stakeholders must be made aware of the problem and be encouraged to develop assistance strategies and set up peer support groups in schools³⁴.

33. Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, Direction générale de la planification et de l'évaluation, *Les indicateurs de la politique québécoise de la santé et du bien-être, Exercice de suivi 1998*, Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1998.

34. Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, Direction générale de la planification et de l'évaluation, *Stratégie québécoise d'action face au suicide: s'entraider pour la vie*, Québec, 1998, p. 42.

2.7 Sexual relations

- In all, about 4% of all 13-year-olds, with as many boys as girls, have already had sexual relations involving penetration; the proportion is 39% among 16-year-olds.
- Moreover, about 3% of 13-year-olds say they have already had a homosexual experience, which is the case with about 5% of 16-year-olds.
- On the subject of contraceptive methods, the results show that the proportion of boys who reveal they used a condom, alone or in combination with the pill, remains constant between the first and last time they had sexual relations, while it dropped among girls. The results seem to show that condoms are used more at the start of sexual activity; over time, some young people abandon protection against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and choose to protect themselves against pregnancy only.
- About 5% of the teenage boys surveyed report that one of their partners has already been pregnant, while 6% of girls report that they have been pregnant.
- According to data from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, every year in Québec, about 2% of girls under 18 become pregnant. Even if the pregnancy rate among girls has remained constant since 1994 and the fertility rate among those under 18 is the lowest ever recorded, more than 3 756 pregnancies and 981 births were recorded among those under 18 for 1998 alone³⁵.
- A survey conducted by the Ministère on the educational services that are provided for pregnant girls and mothers under 20 reveals that despite interesting, original initiatives, the number of girls who are given assistance seems to be minimal considering the need; moreover, in all regions a flagrant lack of places in day-care centres is reported³⁶.
- Moreover, about 15% of 13-year-olds and 18% of 16-year-olds say their parents never talk about sex with them; one third of teenagers also say their parents talk about relationships or contraception only very little or never. However, 16-year-olds with a parent who discusses sex often or very often with them use contraceptives more than those whose parents are more discreet on the subject.
- About 86% of 13-year-olds and 16-year-olds attend schools that provide information sessions on contraception and STDs, and 83% of schools offer supplementary educational activities on sexuality.
- Moreover, the ISQ survey was concerned with the incidence of violence in relationships 13- and 16-year-olds were involved in during the twelve-month

35. S. Roy en collaboration with D. Charest, *Pregnant Teens and Teenage Mothers: A Statistical Portrait*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002.

36. S. Roy en collaboration with D. Charest, *The Organization of Educational Services Provided for Pregnant Teens and Teenage Mothers, Results of a study on the services offered by the school system*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002.

period prior to the survey. Only boys and girls who had one or more relationships during this period were asked about violence. Girls were asked about the violence they may have been subjected to, and boys were asked about the violence they may have inflicted on their partners; the violence referred to here is of a psychological, physical or sexual nature³⁷.

- Of the young people who had had relationships in the twelve-month period prior to the survey, 22% of 13-year-old girls and 34% of 16-year-old girls reported acts or behaviours of psychological violence. Moreover, 15% of 13-year-old girls and 20% of 16-year-old girls say they were subjected to one or more acts of physical violence and about 6% of 13-year-old girls and 11% of 16-year-old girls report one or more incidents of sexual violence. Moreover, 11% of 13-year-old boys and 19% of 16-year-old boys admit to having inflicted psychological violence on girls they were dating, while 10% of 16-year-old boys say they have inflicted physical violence on their partners.

37. Since the data from the survey on violence in relationships are still preliminary, mainly because of the restricted number of items, details about the forms of violence cannot be given. No information is available on the effects of the violence inflicted, either. The subject of mutual violence was not explored, either.

Discussion questions for the stakeholders

- How could the services of parents and partners in the community, present or potential, be called on to improve various aspects of young people's health?
- Other than the physical education courses scheduled in the timetable, how could other physical and sports activities be encouraged? How could at-risk students be encouraged to participate in these activities? Does the range of existing physical and sports activities meet the needs of all students, girls in particular?
- What measures has the school adopted to raise awareness about tobacco, alcohol or drugs? How are students being associated with these measures?
- Are issues related to psychological distress, particularly suicidal thoughts among youth, being addressed in school curriculum?
- What are the strong and weak points of educational practices regarding knowledge and prevention of distress-related problems among youth? What roles are school staff and partners being called on to play in this area? In what ways are parents associated with programs or activities affecting young people's mental health?
- What steps is the school taking to shatter the myths surrounding at-risk sexual behaviours and prejudices about homosexuality? Are any support measures in place that were developed to provide the necessary assistance to victims of sexual violence or to young people who must live with the consequences of risky sexual behaviours?
- In view of the frequently precarious situation that pregnant girls or young mothers find themselves in, what services are they being offered to give them a chance to resume or further their studies (e.g. access to daycare, introduction of parent-children activities, tutoring, collaboration with community organizations)?
- What items reported in the survey on young people's health merit an in-depth study or could be the subject of a professional development activity?

In General

- What is the current situation with respect to young people's health at school or in the community (e.g. diet, physical activities, body image, use of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs, psychological distress)?
- How could this type of data be obtained?
- What forms of preventive actions, services and support has the school developed to promote better health among its students?
- How do you rate their relevance and effectiveness? How could the situation be improved?

3. The family: the primary environment in young people's lives

The family, as everyone knows, is the primary environment in young people's lives, the space in which they grow up, develop their self-confidence, learn to communicate and enter into relationships with others and acquire values and knowledge about themselves and the world around them. Several studies have shown that the family environment plays a vital role in young people's personal growth, as well as in their success and their perseverance in their studies. Correlations have already been established between young people's academic success and their parents' income and education. Indeed, the data from one Canadian survey reveal that several family characteristics, especially having a single parent, a large number of brothers and sisters and a low family income, can be risk factors for children's performance at school. This is an argument in favour of adopting a comprehensive approach to improving academic success³⁸.

It is well-known that parents with a high level of education are often better equipped to help their child learn to read and establish in the home conditions that are conducive to success at school. The parents' education has a strong bearing on the value attached to studies in the family; more educated parents tend to value success at school, to encourage reading and to have higher expectations for their child's education.

Young people living in difficult social and economic conditions will have more obstacles to overcome in order to do well at school and to continue their studies. Many parents, who received little education themselves or whose own studies were disrupted, will find it more difficult to help their children with their homework, convey a positive image of school, have high academic aspirations for them or feel confident or competent when dealing with teaching staff. Since such parents must also often deal with a set of poverty- and insecurity-related problems on a daily basis, they are likely to be less available.

However, several studies show that even when their parents have a low level of education or economic conditions are unfavourable, other factors can contribute to children's academic success. Certain positive parental behaviours, such as sustained academic monitoring, nurturing parental behaviour, being open and attentive to school life, can greatly help young people perform well at school³⁹.

In the same way, school can play a positive role to offset difficult conditions in the family environment. Research shows that when the school asks them directly to do this and reduces barriers, parents play a more active role, both at school and at home, in their child's learning, regardless of their socioeconomic status⁴⁰.

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38. B.A. Ryan, G. R. Adams, *Family Relationships and Children's School Achievement: Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*, Canada, Applied Research Branch, Human Resources Development Canada, working paper, 1998.
 39. S. Landy and K.K. Tam, Yes, parenting does make a difference to the development of children in Canada. In: *Growing Up in Canada. National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, 1996, p. 117-126; R. Deslandes and P. Potvin, "Le milieu familial et the réussite éducative des adolescents," *Bulletin du CRIRES*, Nouvelles CEQ, January -February 1998, p. 1-4.
 40. B. S. Simon, *Effects of High Schools' Outreach on Family Involvement*, communication presented to the annual assembly of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA, 2001; O.Moles, *Overcoming barriers to family involvement in low-income area schools*, paper presented to the European Research Network About Parents in Education, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1999.

The school must help establish an educational community in which parents are asked to join forces with it to promote their children's success. Greater collaboration between the school and families can lead to diverse, more regular communications and more opportunities for reinforcing and supporting their role in tangible ways. Moreover, several authors stress the interest of introducing the dimension of school-family-community collaboration into teacher training ⁴¹.

In this section, we present data on the types of families young people come from, their parents' education and occupation, and household income. Next, we examine some of the activities young people pursue outside of school, such as remunerative work, homework and lessons, reading, watching television and using a computer. Finally, we report on parents' interest in school life and the importance of social support as a factor in social adjustment⁴².

What the survey reveals about the family environment

3.1 Type of family

- More than two thirds of 9-, 13- and 16-year olds live with both parents, and between 12 and 13% live with a parent and a step-parent. Finally, between 15 and 18% of youth, depending on the age group, live with a single parent.
- Generally, children who live with a single parent are at a disadvantage in several ways: they live with parents who are more often unemployed, have lower incomes and are generally less educated than parents in other types of families. In short, they live with more poverty and insecurity, and these often interrelated problems can be detrimental to their academic success. From these perspectives, 9-year-olds living in single-parent families appear to be at a greater disadvantage than 13- and 16-year-old teenagers living in the same situation.
- According to the data from the 1996 census processed by the Ministère de l'Éducation to draw up a map of the school population, 16% of families with children under 18 are headed by a single parent, a phenomenon that is even more pronounced in the Montréal region (20%).
- **The survey data show that nearly one third of Québec youth aged 9, 13 and 16 do not live with both parents, mainly because they are separated or divorced** More than three quarters of these young people live with their mothers, either all of the time or most of the time. Joint custody is the situation for only 6 to 11% of young people whose parents are separated.
- **In broken and single-parent families, a high rate of absent fathers is noted;** less than half of young people with separated parents regularly visit the other parent (which in most cases is the father); between 17 and 19% of young

41. R. Deslandes, "La collaboration école-famille-communauté dans une perspective de formation continue," in L. Lafortune et al (ed), *La formation continue: de la réflexion à l'action*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2001, p. 73-97.

42. To obtain more information on the findings presented in this section, see S. Roy, *Pour améliorer les pratiques éducatives : des données d'enquête sur les jeunes, fascicule d'accompagnement* 3: *Milieu familial et activités des jeunes*. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2003.

people have no contact with their fathers, while 8 to 12% have contact with them only by telephone or through letters.

- More than 80% of young people have other children living in their families; for three quarters of them, these are their biological brothers and sisters. In all three age groups, an estimated 10% of young people have a variety of sibling relationships consisting of half-sisters or half-brothers or the step-parent's children. This situation is more common in blended families and single-parent families. Moreover, 15% of the nine-year-olds, 13% of the 13-year-olds and 19% of the 16-year-olds are an only child.
- *The Policy on Health and Well-being*⁴³ stresses that tensions or conflicts arising from family breakups are at the root of a panoply of health and social adjustment problems that affect ex-spouses, but more especially children. Many authors report fairly major disruptions in children's development after their parents get divorced or separated⁴⁴. However, in many cases the difficulties following breakups generally give way to a new balance at the end of a two-year process⁴⁵. Moreover, as *Priorités nationales de santé publique 1997-2002*⁴⁶ stresses repeatedly, in order to foster young people's development and social adjustment, it is important that the father-child relationship be promoted.

3.2 Parents' occupation and education

- About half of young people live in a family in which both parents work, and more than one third live in a family in which only one parent works. Finally, **about one young person out of ten lives in a household in which both parents were unemployed at the time of the survey.**
- More than one quarter of young people in all three age groups have at least one parent with an atypical work schedule (not working during the day, from Monday to Friday). This situation is more pronounced in disadvantaged family backgrounds. **Thus, 58% of 13-year-olds living in a low-income household have at least one parent with an atypical work schedule, a situation that applies to only 18% of young people of the same age living in a high-income household.**
- More than one quarter of young people have at least one parent who works more than 40 hours a week, on average. There is a significant correlation between the number of hours worked and household income; as a rule, the number of hours parents work is higher in economically favoured family backgrounds. Still, in all three age groups, about half of young people who live in

43. Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, *The Policy on Health and Well-being*, Québec, Québec Government, 1992.

44. S. Drapeau and C. Bouchard, "Soutien familial et ajustement des parents séparés," *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, vol. 25, n° 2, p. 205-229.

45. E.M. Hetherington, "Coping with family transition: winners, losers and survivors," *Child Development*, n° 60, 1989, p. 1-14.

46. Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, *Priorités nationales de santé publique, 1997-2002*, Québec, Québec Government, 1997.

low-income families have at least one parent who works 40 hours or more a week.

- According to analyses done by the Ministère, the two variables most strongly associated with academic lag and non-graduation are the proportion of mothers with no Secondary School Diploma and the proportion of families in which neither parent has a full-time job⁴⁷.
- Roughly half of young people aged 9, 13 and 16 live in a family in which at least one parent has a college or university education, while more than one young person out of ten lives with at least one parent who does not have a Secondary School Diploma. Moreover, the mothers of 15% of 9- and 13-year-olds did not complete their secondary studies, and the same is true of 19% of 16-year-olds. Since they have little education, a fair number of parents are more likely to experience difficulties reading.
- According to the data from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS 1994), about one million adults in Québec ranging in age from 16 to 65, or one out of five, has a very limited reading ability. Moreover, according to statistics from the 1996 Canadian census, about 30% of the adult population, or almost a million and a half people, do not have a Secondary School Diploma, often considered the minimum level needed for becoming integrated into and functioning properly in society. All literacy surveys confirm that there is a close link between education and reading skills; thus, 89% of adults with less than 9 years of schooling are ranked at the lowest level for reading skills⁴⁸.

3.3 Household income

- According to the ISQ survey results, 17% of 13-year-olds, 13% of 16-year-olds and 20% of 9-year-olds live in low-income families. The data therefore show that 9-year-old children are more likely than teenagers to live in poverty.
- Many young people do not eat their fill every day. Food insecurity, as defined in the survey on the basis of the questions that parents were asked about diversity, quantity and quality of the diet at home⁴⁹, is a problem for 11 to 13% of young people. Food insecurity is even more present in the lives of young people whose parents did not complete secondary studies (20 to 30%) and those who live with a single parent (21 to 31%).
- Income is an item essential for determining the economic situation, but poverty also means job insecurity, a poorly heated or unsafe dwelling, lack of food, stress, lack of self-esteem, etc. As the Canadian Council on Social Development

47. Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, Direction de LA recherche, Direction des statistiques et des études quantitatives, *La réussite scolaire au Québec, une étude sur le cheminement sans retard et l'obtention d'un diplôme chez les élèves des écoles primaires et secondaires*, 2000.

48. S. Roy and D. Charest, *la population cible de la formation de base*, Série documentaire sur la formation de base à l'éducation des adultes, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de la recherche, 2000.

49. For the purposes of the survey, food insecurity is said to exist when one of the three factors is declared to be present "often" or "occasionally."

stresses, poverty in Canada is still a very troubling phenomenon that in 1999 affected 18.5% of children, which is lower than in 1993, but higher than in 1989.

- According to this organization, children living in poverty for prolonged periods participate less than others in recreational activities, are twice as likely to have a dysfunctional family and be subjected to violence and are three times more likely to live with a parent suffering from depression⁵⁰. In short, in the long term, child poverty can seriously jeopardize a child's ability to grow, and can reduce the extent to which he or she can become a healthy, self-sufficient adult.

3.4 Young people's activities

- The ISQ survey data enabled us to paint a broad picture of some of the activities young people engage in. Below we present, in order, data on the remunerative work young people perform, and the time they devote to homework and lessons, reading, watching television and using the computer.

Remunerative work

- About one fourth of 13-year-olds and one third of 16-year-olds hold a paid job, with as many boys as girls. Thirteen-year-olds have fewer work hours per week than 16-year-olds; most of them (85%) work ten hours a week or less. Among 16-year-olds who have a job, 17% work from 16 to 20 hours a week and 10% work twenty hours or more a week.
- Young people say they work mainly so that they can treat themselves to the things they want, acquire experience and save for the future. But **for many young people, working also proves to be a necessity: 43% of 13-year-olds and 33% of 16-year-olds who work say they do so to help their parents and about the same proportion say they work to pay for essential items they need at school**. However, based on the results, no significant correlation can be established between the remunerative work young people perform and household income.
- Young people have been working for a long time. Since the late 1970s, the large increase in young people who do remunerative work has raised concern in the Québec population⁵¹. Moreover, while work can have positive outcomes from the standpoint of socialization, research also demonstrates that there is a strong correlation between working too many hours (generally more than twenty a week) and dropping out of school⁵². Beyond this limit, it is not well known how working affects young people's psychosocial development and health.

50. Canadian Council on Social Development, *Progress of Canada's Children 2002*, Ottawa, 2002.

51. L. Bisson, *Élèves au travail: le travail des jeunes du secondaire en cours d'année scolaire*, Brief, Québec, Conseil permanent de la jeunesse, 1998.

52. Conseil des affaires sociales, *Je gagne des sous... donc je suis: les 12-15 ans et le travail*, brief au Conseil des affaires sociales, 1992; C. Beauchesne and S. Dumas, *Étudier et travailler? Enquête auprès des élèves du secondaire sur le travail rémunéré durant l'année scolaire*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 1993.

Homework and lessons

- More than three quarters of teenagers spend five hours or less a week on their homework and lessons; a tendency to reduce the number of hours spent on homework and lessons has been observed between the ages of 13 and 16. Moreover, teenage girls spend more time a week on their homework than teenage boys. It should be noted that two thirds of 9-year-olds, with boys and girls in equal numbers, spend 30 minutes or less a day on their school work, while the other third spend more than 30 minutes a day on it. At ages 9 and 13, the time devoted to homework and lessons appears to be related to the mother's education: the more education the mother has, the more time they spend on homework.

Reading

- One out of three 13-year-olds read a newspaper during the week prior to the survey, and about two thirds read a book or magazine. As children grow older, books lose their popularity to magazines and newspapers. Thus, books are by far the most popular reading material for 9-year-old children, while for 13-year-olds, magazines are the reading material of choice. 16-year-olds prefer to read a magazine or newspaper rather than a book. Moreover, no matter what their age, 12% of young people report they have read nothing for pleasure in a week (book, magazine or newspaper).
- **At ages 9, 13 and 16, boys read less than girls during their spare time.** Indeed, they read fewer books than girls, have fewer different sources of reading material (especially during adolescence) and a larger number of them do not read outside of the school setting. Thus, at age 13, 18% of boys report they read nothing for pleasure, a proportion three times higher than among girls of this age.
- Teenagers who read more have a better perception of their educational achievements in the language of instruction and generally spend more time on their homework than those who read less.
- According to a 1994 Ministère de l'Éducation survey on the reading habits of secondary school students, about three quarters of students like to read a lot or an average amount; a little more than half read three books or more in the four-month period prior to the survey, but 20% report they read nothing. Moreover, 40% of young people say they read less than an hour a week, 30%, from one to two hours a week and another 30%, three hours or more a week. A great many more girls read for three or more hours a week (40%) than boys (22%). Based on students' answers, fathers read books a lot less frequently than mothers⁵³.
- According to a survey conducted by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications⁵⁴, a large percentage of the adult population of Québec never read daily newspapers (18%), magazines (31%) or books (30%); these

53. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Lecture chez les jeunes du secondaire*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 1994.

54. Québec, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, Direction de la recherche, de l'évaluation et de la statistique, *Enquête sur les pratiques culturelles des Québécoises et des Québécois 1999*.

proportions have increased since 1979; a decrease in time spent on reading is observed especially in young people from ages 5 to 24. Moreover, with the exception of newspapers, which they read more often, men read less than women. According to the same survey, education is strongly associated with reading habits: people who have only completed elementary school read a lot less than more educated people: 28% of them never read newspapers, 54% never read magazines and 59% never read books.

Computer and television

- More than two thirds of young people surveyed have access to a computer at home. The overwhelming majority of them use it, but more boys do so than girls.
- Notwithstanding the increasing use of computers in Québec homes, the correlation between household income and ownership of a computer has remained constant: roughly half of 9-, 13- or 16-year-olds living in low-income areas have a computer at home, whereas more than three quarters of young people living in high-income areas one. It may be assumed, however, that access to a computer has become more widespread since the survey was conducted in 1999, in view of the gradual implementation of the government program “Connecting Families to the Internet,” launched in May 2000⁵⁵.
- As a rule, watching television takes up an average of 3.5 hours a day for 13-year-olds, 3.1 hours for 16-year-olds and 2.6 hours for 9-year-olds. The greatest self-declared “TV addicts” are therefore 13-year-olds. As a rule, boys say they watch a little more television than girls, regardless of the age category.
- According to a survey of cultural customs in Québec, adults aged 15 and over spend an average of 2.7 hours a day watching television. Adults with little schooling (who have completed elementary or secondary studies) and inactive adults watch more television than adults who are more educated or active⁵⁶. Moreover, the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS 1994) confirm the strong correlation between reading abilities and amount of time spent watching television: people with the lowest reading levels (levels 1 and 2) spend a lot more time every day watching television than people with better reading abilities.⁵⁷

55. On May 1, 2000, the Québec government set up a program called “Connecting Families to the Internet.” Under this program, families that were receiving a family allocation from the Régie des rentes du Québec were eligible for a discount on Internet services and for the rental or purchase of a multimedia computer. Families had until March 31, 2001 to register for the program and use the attestation certificate provided by the Régie des rentes du Québec.

56. Québec, Ministère de la culture et des communications, Direction de la recherche et de la statistique, *Enquête sur les pratiques culturelles des Québécoises et des Québécois 1999*, (Chapter 1).

57. Canada, Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, National Literacy Secretariat, *Reading the future: A portrait of literacy in Canada*, n° 89-551-XPF in the Statistics Canada Catalogue, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 1996.

3.5 Parents' interest in school life

- The overwhelming majority of 9-year-olds say that their parents take an interest in what they do at school, encourage them to succeed, make sure they do their homework well and attend report card meetings.
- Based on the secondary students' answers, a certain decline in parents' participation or interest can be observed: the parents of 68% of 13-year-olds and 52% of 16-year-olds often talk with them about what they are going through at school, but the parents of 9-year-olds do this more. Teenagers' parents also appear to enquire less than 9-year-olds' parents about what is happening at school and go to report card meetings less frequently.
- In all three age groups, the survey reports no significant difference between boys' and girls' perceptions of their parents' interest in school life.
- Parents who take an interest in school life, encourage their children to be independent and have a high degree of commitment that can help them to perform well and have higher academic aspirations, and can help reduce disciplinary problems as well⁵⁸. Moreover, secondary students perceive that their mothers participate more in academic monitoring than their fathers, both at home and at school. However, fathers seem to become involved more in boys' lives; thus fathers are believed to participate more in parents' meetings at school and discussions about current events or future plans if they have boys rather than girls⁵⁹.

3.6 Social support

- In the ISQ survey, only the function of emotional support was measured⁶⁰, because it is the one most often associated with children's and teenagers' social adjustment. Several indicators were used to measure this function: presence of at least one support person in case of need, perceived support from parents, siblings, friends or teachers, number of sources of support, the tendency to confide in someone if they need to, the fact that they confided in someone in the six-month period prior to the survey and their satisfaction with the support received.
- The results show that most young people say they have a good support network and that various people can provide them with support and consolation if they need it. Nonetheless, a not inconsiderable proportion of young people have fewer resources they can rely on if the need arises, which makes them particularly vulnerable.

58. R. Deslandes and P. Potvin, "Le milieu familial et la réussite éducative des adolescents," *Bulletin du CRIRES*, Nouvelles CEQ, January-February 1998, p. 1-4.

59. R. Deslandes and R. Cloutier, "Engagement parental dans l'accompagnement scolaire et la réussite des adolescents à l'école," *Bulletin de psychologie scolaire d'orientation*, vol. 2, 2000, p.53-72.

60. The other three types of support recognized by research are instrumental support, information and advice and recreational support.

- Thirteen-year-olds say that if they want to confide in someone, the first person they turn to is their mothers. Friends and fathers rank second and third, respectively, as the most important sources of support perceived by young people. For 16-year-olds, friends are perceived as the main source of support, followed by the mother. At this age, the father comes in fourth place only. Among 9-year-old children, the most helpful people are perceived to be the mother first, followed by the father, then teachers. **In short, the mother is the main source of support for young people; the perception of the father and teachers as important sources of support decreases with age, while friends and siblings are increasingly perceived as fulfilling this role.**
- Studies demonstrate the importance of the teacher-child relationship in learning. For example, a study on the assessment of programs aimed at preventing students from dropping out illustrates that if these programs succeed, it is mainly because they improve the quality of the student-teacher relationship, which, in turn, has a decisive impact on students' performance and behaviours at school. As has been observed, the more students succeed, the more they will like their teachers and find them to be "good teachers" and the more readily they will make the extra effort that teachers require of them⁶¹.
- Among teenagers, girls rely more on their friends than boys, who more often seem to see their fathers as an important source of support. In all three age groups, the tendency to confide in someone if a problem arises is greater in girls than in boys⁶².
- A social support network provides protection, especially regarding depression and distress in adolescence. During adolescence, the support of friends occupies an important place, but the support of parents and family plays a vital role throughout people's whole lives, especially during periods of stress or anxiety. Generally, the results of surveys point to a positive correlation between young people's adjustment and the support of parents or family⁶³. The ISQ survey results bolster some of the recommendations of the *Groupe de travail pour les jeunes*, including one which states that the support children are given in their home environment, especially from the father, must be promoted and reinforced⁶⁴.
- Young people's parents were also asked about what support they could expect to receive from people around them if they need it. It is estimated that from 12 to 15% of 9-, 13- and 16-year-olds have one parent who do not have any form of support, either to confide in someone, or to ask for help. **The survey shows that isolated parents are found in all types of families and in all socioeconomic strata; in fact, little correlation has been found between**

61. M. Janosz and M.-A. Deniger, *Évaluation de programmes de prévention du décrochage scolaire pour des adolescents de milieux défavorisés*, Montréal, CRIRES, p. 69-70 (<<http://www.ulaval.ca/crites/pdf/rappsynt.pdf>>).

62. It should be specified that girls see themselves more in this form of support than boys and, in that sense, the evaluation instrument can introduce a bias, depending on the respondent's sex.

63. J.M. Richman, L.B. Rosenfeld and G.L. Bowen, "Social support for adolescence at risk of school failure," *Social work*, vol. 43, n° 4, p. 309-323; S. Drapeau and C. Bouchard, "Soutien familial et ajustement des parents séparés," *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, Vol. 25, n° 2, 1993, p. 205-229.

64. C. Bouchard et al, *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*, Report of the Groupe de travail pour les jeunes, Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Direction des communications, 1991.

the parent's social support network and the type of family or household income.

- Studies conducted in the context of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) have shown other than poverty, parents' attitude, family functioning and the mother's degree of depression were the strongest predictors of a child's development⁶⁵.
- Some studies have shown that the parents' social support network has a protective effect on family functioning, especially in terms of their relationships with their children. Thus, mothers with a strong social support network are more likely to satisfy their children's emotional needs and to be more nurturing and less controlling with them⁶⁶.

Discussion questions for the stakeholders

- In what way does the school help to maintain a positive image among parents (e.g. welcoming parents at school, invitations, positive communication concerning their child or teenager, availability of staff)?
- In what way does the school inform parents of the activities in which they can become involved (e.g. during the general assembly at the start of the year, through a brief note, by posting information in the school)?
- In communications with parents, are messages adapted so as to better reach out to those who have less schooling or difficulty reading (e.g. using simple language, writing short messages, favouring verbal messages)?
- In messages sent to parents, are those who have joint custody of their children taken into account?
- How are parents made aware of the need to support their teenagers in their school life, and how are they encouraged to do this (e.g. informing parents about various issues that affect teenagers' lives; supporting parents in seeking adequate solutions to problems related to training, communicating with and monitoring their children; encouraging parents to adopt firm, consistent and open attitudes rather than being repressive or permissive)?
- Has the school made special efforts to encourage fathers to participate more in their children's school or extracurricular activities?
- Do students' parents have opportunities to share their experience as parents and break out of their isolation? Do they take part in activities held by the school or by community organizations associated with the school that offer new forms of support?

65. Human Resources Development Canada, Which Family Characteristics Make the Most Difference in Children's Success in School?, Applied Research Bulletin, Special Edition on Child Development, 1999, p. 5-9. (<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sp-ps/arb-dgra/publications/bulletin/child_dev/f/chi_dev_f.pdf>).

66. K.D. Jennings, V. Stagg and R.E. Connors, "Social networks and mothers' interactions with their preschool Children," *Child Development*, vol. 62, 1991, p. 966-978.

- Has the school forged ties with partners in the community to support families struggling with economic difficulties or problems of isolation or insecurity (e.g. providing free or cheap meals at school or arranging to have them provided on the premises of another organization; proposing occasions for discussions among parents; becoming involved in used clothing sales with each new season; promoting community organizations)?
- Does the school organize activities designed to encourage reading (e.g. presenting various works, looking after the school library, inviting writers to talk in class, public readings of novels, scientific activities)? To what extent do reading activities and suggestions take into account the wide range of interests of young people, especially boys?
- Does the school make students, parents and employers in the community aware of some of the issues involved in balancing work with studies (e.g. the duration of a reasonable workweek, maximum work time on school days, favourable conditions for striking a balance between work and studies)?
- What items reported in the survey on young people's home environment warrant an in-depth study or could be the subject of a professional development activity?

In General

- What is the current situation of families, students, the school and the community?
- What are the parents' needs in terms of school-family collaboration?
- How could this type of data be obtained?
- What are the educational stakeholders' practices concerning school-family collaboration?
- How do you rate their relevance and effectiveness? How could the situation be improved?

Conclusion

The Québec survey on health and well being of young people aged 9, 13 and 16 gives quite a positive overall image of youth. Indeed, the majority live in favourable conditions be it in terms of family income, parents' education, their presence and the support they offer, both emotionally or in terms of academic monitoring. Moreover, most young people have people in their immediate circle they can confide in, enjoy school, are confident they will do well and have sufficient self-esteem. Finally, about three quarters of young people are non-smokers, have a normal weight and are physically active.

That being said, vigilance must be exercised in the case of a significant number of young people. Indeed, many have family situations that are likely to affect their educational development: poverty, single-parenthood, absent father, parents with a crowded work schedule, isolated parents and lack of support or interest in school life. A certain number of young people have repeated a year, lack self-confidence at school and read little; others like school to some extent and are successful at what they do outside school. Moreover, one fifth of teenagers have a high level of psychological distress, and one third of 9-year-old children have serious emotional disorders, which causes many of them to have suicidal thoughts. Other young people are overweight and do not engage enough in physical activities, and a large number of them are dissatisfied with their body image and want to change their appearance. Finally, still others abuse tobacco, alcohol or drugs, which could have serious consequences for their future.

In this summary, we have attempted to determine whether the phenomena measured were more prevalent in disadvantaged family backgrounds, even if this was not one of the objectives of this survey. It goes without saying that the results confirm that several problems, namely poverty, parents' lack of schooling and food insecurity, are more severe in disadvantaged families. A higher proportion of young people in poor families repeat a year, have lower academic aspirations and skip breakfast in the morning. In such cases, individual, family and school problems combine to compromise their chances of succeeding at school. The survey has also shown that several phenomena are not necessarily related to young people's family environment or income.

In brief, it is important to have a nuanced perception of the phenomena affecting young people and to bear in mind that some enjoy and do well at school, even in disadvantaged areas, while others have serious problems even though they are from a so-called privileged background. More vigilance and attention are therefore needed not only in the case of disadvantaged backgrounds, but in other areas as well.

It would also be advisable to have a nuanced perception of boys' and girls' situation. The results of the survey show that the differences between boys and girls are significant in many respects, particularly self-esteem, psychological distress and emotional disorders, interest in school, reading habits and prevalence of at-risk behaviours. In general, while boys have many types of difficulties, it is often girls who are at a disadvantage. In short, it is important that girls who drop out not be overlooked, and that those who dislike school be given support; it is also important to keep in mind that many boys like reading and school, and that they will continue unhindered until they obtain their university diploma.

Finally, the ISQ survey sheds light on several very contrasting aspects of young people's perceptions and behaviours, in terms of health, sports, lifestyle, relationship with school, recreation, etc. This prompts us to adopt a comprehensive approach that goes beyond concerns related to academic success and calls for more focused interventions adapted to young people's

needs, depending on their age or whether they are male or female. Finally, it would be advisable to adopt dynamic forms of intervention and preventive action rather than only taking action every once in a while or when a problem arises. The discussion questions provided in this document are invitations to examine the situation attentively and seek solutions that are adapted to each school environment. It is to be hoped that the results of this survey will be able to provide food for thought in the school environment to promote the full growth of Québec youth.

Further details about the survey

The 1999 survey on the social lives and health of Québec children and teenagers applies to all 9-, 13- and 16-year-olds, or 98% of the total population of children and teenagers in these age groups attending a Québec school. It should be noted that a sample of 16-year-olds who are no longer attending school is also part of the survey population⁶⁷. The three age groups are composed of three independent populations. For each group, the sample was constructed according to a stratified multistage design.

At the outset, the sample sizes were set at about 1 500 young people for each age group. To ensure the best possible distribution for the sample, the school population for all the administrative regions selected⁶⁸ was stratified according to the language of instruction (English and French), the schools network (public and private) and the geographic area (based on the Census Metropolitan Area). For each of the three age groups, schools were selected and then children and teenagers were randomly selected according to gender.

For each age group, about 60 schools were selected, with about 25 students surveyed in each school. In all, about 1 200 young people at 189 schools participated in the survey in each age group, yielding a response rate of 83% for 9-year-old children, 79% for 13-year-olds and 75% for 16-year-olds. The data were gathered from January 18 to May 6, 1999⁶⁹.

The research team spent about three hours in a room placed at its disposal in each school. A series of health-related measurements (weight, blood tests, height, etc.) were performed on the students, who also answered a questionnaire of 45-60 minutes' duration, with interviewers assisting in the case of 9-year-old children. The questionnaires addressed to children and teenagers were based on several studies and surveys. Some questions were adapted for the 9-year-old group, mainly by narrowing the range of response choices. The questionnaires, in English and French, were pretested and approved by the survey steering committee.

The questionnaire for parents was addressed to the one who knows the child better. It was designed to collect information on the child's health and educational development, family and social environment, perception of the neighbourhood, and the parents' lifestyle and health. The questionnaire that was addressed to school administrations was the same for elementary and secondary schools; it was designed to describe the child's school environment (services available, school atmosphere and regulations and policies in effect at the school).

A detailed report outlining the results of the survey was published in May 2002 by the Institut de la statistique du Québec and distributed by Les Publications du Québec. Anyone interested in obtaining information about the ISQ and the statistical data available may contact:

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67. An estimated 5% of 16-year-olds in Québec no longer attend school. In all, 52 young people no longer attending school, out of an initial sample of 130, responded to a questionnaire; their responses were integrated with those of the 16-year-old students. Because of the small number of respondents who no longer attend school, the data could not be processed separately; besides, this was not one of the goals of the survey.
68. To reduce the costs of gathering data, two regions were randomly selected from among the following: Bas-Saint-Laurent, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Côte-Nord and Gaspésie ? Îles-de-la-Madeleine.
69. The 16-year-olds who no longer attended school were mailed a questionnaire, which did not include items on the school environment and some of their health-related measurements, but did include questions about their parents' situation, since they did not receive a questionnaire.

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Description of the survey variables

In addition to comparisons based on gender and, where possible, age group, we selected four main variables in order to account for the differences among young people: relative household income, type of family, parents' schooling and the self-esteem assessment. We describe briefly in this appendix how these variables were defined by those in charge of the survey at the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Relative household income

The relative income index accounts for the total 1998 household income before taxes and deductions. Relative income is based on Statistics Canada standards that establish low-income cutoffs based on data on the size of households and on the distribution of family income obtained in the Survey on Consumer Finances (Statistics Canada, 1993). The definitions of categories in the index take into account the fact that this survey concerns young people, about 80% of whom live in a family in which both parents are present.

It should be noted that the relative income index slightly underestimates the percentage of families with a low income or very low income if compared with the low-income cutoffs established by Statistics Canada. For comparison purposes, researchers have generally retained three categories:

- Low or very low income
- Average income
- High or very high income

Type of family

The family environment considered in this survey is that in which children or teenagers most often live. It does not include the traditional concepts of two-parent or blended families, because all siblings are not taken into account in the definition of types of families. The data on joint custody were not retained because they are based on too small a sample.

It should be kept in mind that the description of the family environment specific to this survey does not portray all families in Québec. On the one hand, the data describe only the family environments in which Québec youth aged 9, 13 and 16 live. On the other hand, since the survey is oriented to the children surveyed, not to the family, the data gathered serve to define the environment these children live in, not the family environment as a distinct entity. For purposes of analysis and comparison, researchers have retained three main situations:

- Family with biological father and mother
- Family with parent (father or mother) and step-parent
- Family with single parent (father or mother)

Parents' schooling

The indicator used for purposes of comparison in the survey is the highest level of education attained by one of the parents, either the respondent parent or his or her spouse. According to the data gathered, the level of education is the mother's or the spouse's in 30% of cases and the father's or the spouse's in another 30% of cases; otherwise both spouses are classified under the same level of education. If the information is available only for one parent, this response is considered to be the highest level of parents' education.

For comparisons with the other variables, researchers have retained the following categories:

- Incomplete secondary studies or lower level
- Secondary studies completed
- Studies in a vocational school or a business or specialized college
- College or university studies

Moreover, in view of the importance of this variable in education, we have elected to present some data on the mother's education that are excerpted from the ISQ survey file.

Self-esteem

According to the definition of the survey, the self-esteem assessment attempts to account for children's or teenagers' perceptions of their abilities, the importance they attach to them and their own assessment of their skills.

The self-esteem of 9-year-old children was measured by means of eight items in a sub-scale of the Likert type taken from Marsh's self-description questionnaire; their reliability and validity were assessed in numerous studies⁷⁰. A French version of the instrument was validated on a sample of Québec children in Elementary Cycle Two. An index on a scale ranging from 8 to 32 was constructed; the higher the score, the higher the level of self-esteem. On this index, the partial non-response rate of 9-year-old children is 5.2% and is also divided according to gender.

The self-esteem of 13- and 16-year-old teenagers was examined using the French translation of *Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale*⁷¹. This questionnaire consists of ten items; from the standpoint of the general concept of self-esteem, it can be likened to Marsh's self-description questionnaire. The psychometric qualities of the French translation are acceptable and compare favourably with those of the English version (Vallières and Vallerand, 1990). The scale range varies from 10 to 40; the higher the score, the higher the level of self-esteem. The partial non-response rate, which is 5.6% among 13-year-old teenagers and 2.7% among 16-year-olds, is also divided according to gender.

70. H. W. Marsh, "A multidimensional, hierarchical model of self-concept: theoretical and empirical justification," *Educational Psychology Review*, vol. 2, n° 2, 1990, p. 77-172.

71. E. F. Vallières and R. Vallerand, "Traduction et validation canadienne-française de l'échelle de l'estime de soi de Rosenberg," *International Journal of Psychology*, vol. 25, 1990, p. 305-316.

The teenagers' responses were divided into three categories:

- Low self-esteem (corresponding to the lowest quintile)
- Average self-esteem (corresponding to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th quintiles)
- High self-esteem (corresponding to the highest quintile)

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