

WISCONSIN YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY (YRBS)¹ 2007

Risk Behaviors and Factors of Youth Engaging in Same-Sex Sexual Behaviors

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Background

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LBGT) youth and adults experience health disparities compared to their heterosexual peers². In 2007 for the first time, Wisconsin added a question to its Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asking respondents the gender(s) of the persons with whom they had had sexual contact. The YRBS surveys high-school students across Wisconsin. Information from this question allows us to better understand health conditions and behaviors of youth engaging in same-sex sexual behaviors compared to their peers engaging in opposite-sex sexual behaviors.

Method

Analysts used SAS 9.1.3 statistical software and followed the methods outlined in a CDC publication about analysis of YRBS data³. Risk behaviors and health conditions of students who reported having had opposite-sex sexual contact only (referred to hereafter as “het-sex”) were compared to those of students who had same-sex sexual contact (“same-sex”). Students in the second group may also have had sexual contact with persons of the opposite sex. Youth who reported not having engaged in any sexual contact (“no-sex”) were excluded from the analysis. The table presents weighted percentages, confidence intervals, p-values from Rao-Scott Chi-Square tests, and relative risks of same-sex/het-sex. P-values of <.01 and their relative risks are shown in bold.

Key Findings

The 2007 YRBS sample of 2,078 includes 111 same-sex, 1,181 het-sex, and 786 no-sex students. Same-sex respondents comprise 8% of students who have had sexual contact.

The table that follows shows thirty survey items broken down by category. On nearly all questions related to physical safety, emotional safety and support, mental health, and tobacco and drug use, same-sex youth experienced statistically-significantly higher rates of risk behaviors and conditions than did het-sex youth.

- More than one third (35%) of same-sex youth, compared to 20% of het-sex youth, were harassed or bullied so much that they felt unsafe at school or it affected their schoolwork. Same-sex youth report having been forced verbally or physically to take part in sexual activity at three times the rate for het-sex youth (34% vs 11%).
- Same-sex youth experienced lower levels of support from family and teachers, and expressed less of a sense of belonging at school. Nearly as many same-sex as het-sex youth would feel comfortable seeking help from a caring adult, a positive sign.
- Nearly twice as many same-sex youth (47%) experienced depression in the previous year as did het-sex youth (26%).
- One in four same-sex youth (7.5% het-sex youth) had a suicide attempt in the previous 12 months. More than one in seven (15%) same-sex had a suicide attempt in the previous 12 months serious enough that it required medical attention, compared to 2.5% of het-sex youth, a six-fold difference.
- Same-sex youth use tobacco at more than twice the rates of het-sex youth and have higher rates of marijuana and other drug use and frequent binge drinking.

Implications

Policy and programmatic interventions are needed to support same-sex youth and reduce health disparities.

Limitations and Next Steps

In addition to the limitations inherent in the YRBS, the number of same-sex respondents (111) is too small to disaggregate by respondents' gender or other differences. Future analysis will compare the 2007 and 2009 datasets for trends and combine the datasets to increase the size, and thereby the statistical power of the same-sex group.

¹ Information about the national and Wisconsin YRBS is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm> and <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/yrbsindx.html>

² Healthy People 2010: Companion Document for Lesbian, Gay, Transgender Health, http://www.lgbthealth.net/side_hp2010.shtml

³ Software for Analysis of YRBS Data, http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_analysis_software.pdf

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Comparison between youth engaging in same-sex sexual behaviors and youth engaging in only opposite-sex sexual behaviors on items related to physical and emotional safety, mental health, tobacco and substance use, and physical activity and weight issues

Q#	CATEGORY and Item	Respondents who had same-sex sexual contact (may have also had opposite-sex contact)		Respondents who had only opposite-sex sexual contact		p-value (<.01 bold)	Relative Risk: Same-sex/ Het-sex (p<.01 bold)
		Weighted percent	95% Confidence Interval	Weighted percent	95% Confidence Interval		
PHYSICAL SAFETY							
15	Did not go to school on one or more of the past 30 days because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school	16.3%	10.0% 22.6%	6.8%	3.9% 9.7%	.0001	2.4
16	Had been threatened or injured with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property one or more times during the past 12 months	16.8%	10.6% 23.0%	5.7%	4.0% 7.4%	<.0001	2.9
18	Were in a physical fight one or more times during the past 12 months	50.8%	40.6% 60.9%	35.3%	31.3% 39.3%	.001	1.4
21	Were ever hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend during the past 12 months	22.1%	14.8% 29.4%	12.0%	10.1% 13.8%	<.0001	1.8
89	Someone had tried to hurt them by hitting, punching, or kicking them while on school property one or more times during the past 12 months	37.2%	29.0% 45.3%	21.2%	17.1% 25.3%	<.0001	1.8
90	Have been harassed, picked on, or bullied so much that they felt unsafe at school or that it was hard to do their best at school during the past 12 months	35.0%	26.9% 43.2%	20.0%	17.1% 22.9%	<.0001	1.8
91	Never or rarely feel safe from physical harm when they are at school	12.5%	6.2% 18.8%	9.1%	6.3% 11.9%	NS	1.4
94	Have ever been forced, either verbally or physically, to take part in a sexual activity	34.2%	25.3% 43.2%	11.4%	9.4% 13.5%	<.0001	3.0
EMOTIONAL SAFETY AND SUPPORT							
92	Strongly agree or agree that harassment and bullying by other students is a problem at their school	59.6%	49.4% 69.9%	46.7%	42.0% 51.5%	0.02	1.3
111	Strongly agree or agree that their family loves them and gives them help and support when they need it	69.0%	60.5% 77.5%	86.7%	84.5% 88.9%	<.0001	1.3
112	Strongly agree or agree that their teachers really care about them and give them a lot of encouragement	41.4%	30.8% 52.0%	57.6%	53.6% 61.6%	<.0001	1.4
113	Strongly agree or agree that they feel like they belong at this school	45.9%	35.5% 56.3%	68.6%	64.9% 72.1%	<.0001	1.5
114	Would feel comfortable seeking help from one or more adults besides their parents if they had an important question affecting their life	85.6%	80.6% 90.7%	88.3%	86.0% 90.5%	NS	1.0

Q#	CATEGORY and Item	Respondents who had same-sex sexual contact (may have also had opposite-sex contact)		Respondents who had only opposite-sex sexual contact		p-value (<.01 bold)	Relative Risk: Same-sex/ Het-sex (p<.01 bold)
		Weighted percent	95% Confidence Interval	Weighted percent	95% Confidence Interval		
MENTAL HEALTH							
23	Felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row during the past 12 months that they stopped doing some usual activities	47.2%	39.0% 56.1%	25.7%	22.8% 28.6%	<.0001	1.9
88	Have any long-term emotional or mental health problems like depression, anxiety, ADD/ADHD, eating disorders, or cutting	38.3%	29.0% 47.7%	17.9%	14.7% 21.1%	<.0001	2.1
24	Seriously considered attempting suicide during the past 12 months	41.4%	33.9% 48.9%	16.6%	14.1% 19.1%	<.0001	2.5
25	Made a plan about how they would attempt suicide during the past 12 months	31.1%	23.8% 38.3%	10.8%	8.7% 12.9%	<.0001	2.9
26	Actually attempted suicide one or more times during the past 12 months	25.2%	16.7% 33.8%	7.5%	6.1% 9.0%	<.0001	3.4
27	Made a suicide attempt during the past 12 months that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse	14.9%	6.9% 23.0%	2.5%	1.2% 3.8%	<.0001	6.0
TOBACCO AND SUBSTANCE USE							
34	Ever smoked cigarettes daily, that is, at least one cigarette every day for 30 days	41.6%	34.0% 49.2%	19.1%	16.4% 21.8%	<.0001	2.2
31	Smoked more than 10 cigarettes per day on the days they smoked during the past 30 days	19.0%	7.9% 30.1%	6.9%	4.3% 9.5%	.002	2.8
41	Had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days	66.4%	58.5% 74.4%	63.8%	58.9% 68.6%	NS	1.0
42	Had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row, that is, within a couple of hours, on one or more of the past 30 days	48.3%	40.8% 55.9%	43.4%	38.8% 47.9%	NS	1.1
42	Had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row, that is, within a couple of hours, on six or more of the past 30 days	16.3%	11.5% 21.1%	9.6%	7.6% 11.6%	.008	1.7
47	Used marijuana one or more times during the past 30 days	41.6%	32.0% 51.1%	28.6%	25.0% 32.2%	.004	1.5
47	Used marijuana ten or more times during the past 30 days	19.9%	11.7% 28.1%	11.5%	8.9% 14.1%	.006	1.7
49, 51- 54	Ever used cocaine, inhalants, heroin, methamphetamines, or ecstasy	21.9%	13.7% 30.2%	10.2%	8.2% 12.3%	.0002	2.1
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND WEIGHT							
108	Exercised or participated in vigorous physical activity for at least 20 minutes on three or more of the past seven days	60.0%	52.3% 67.7%	70.3%	66.6% 74.0%	0.01	1.2
106	Trying to lose weight	61.7%	54.5% 68.9%	43.1%	39.0% 47.2%	<.0001	1.4
6,7	At risk for becoming overweight (BMI > 85th and <95th percentile)	19.3%	12.1% 26.4%	12.8%	10.8% 14.7%	NS	1.5
6,7	At risk for becoming overweight (BMI > 95th percentile)	11.3%	4.1% 18.5%	9.0%	7.0% 10.9%	NS	1.3

Risk Behaviors and Factors of Youth Engaging in Same-Sex versus Heterosexual Sexual Contact, Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007

