

Population Health Vital Statistics Brief:

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Summary, 2013 & 2018

The *Population Health Vital Statistics Data Brief* series was created to provide regular updates to the 2019 Community Health Assessment and to provide the community with additional important information about population health. For more information on the Community Health Assessment and to access other reports in the *Vital Statistics Data Brief* series, please visit scph.org/assessments-reports

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Adolescent Health

In the years 2018/2019 the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was given to students in Summit County in grades ranging from 7th to 12th grade. A total of 19 middle schools and 20 high schools were surveyed equaling a total of almost 19,000 surveys completed. Approximately 65% of survey participation was from Akron and 35% from the suburbs. Participant ages ranged from 10 to 18 years of age. The majority of respondents were white (~59%) this was followed by African American (~18%), Hispanic (~6%) and Asian (~5%).

Significant improvements / strengths

Since 2013 Summit County adolescents have seen statistically significant improvement in a multitude of indicators. To help further discuss these indicators they will be placed into 5 categories: unintentional injuries and violence, tobacco, alcohol and drugs, gambling and sexual behaviors, and physical activity and other health issues.

- **Unintentional Injuries and Violence**- Middle school students reported wearing seatbelts more often. They claimed to be electronically bullied or bullied on and off of school property less often. Additionally, middle school students had less suicide attempts in the last month. High school students reported that they carried a weapon, attempted suicide and drove after consuming alcohol less often than those students surveyed in 2013.
- **Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs**- Less middle and high school students reported having ever used alcohol. There was a decrease in the number of middle school students reporting use of marijuana and cigarettes in the last 30 days. Furthermore, middle school students saw a decrease in the initiation of the use of drugs

such as heroin and prescription pain medications.

- **Gambling and sexual behaviors**- Among those middle school students reporting being currently sexually active there was improvement in reported condom use. Middle school students were also more likely to have ever had a discussion with their family regarding HIV/AIDS. Less high school students had ever had sex or were currently sexually active. Gambling money and personal items had also decreased for high school students.
- **Physical activity and other health issues**- Middle school and high school students report spending less time per day watching TV than in 2013. Both groups of students were also more likely to have seen a professional for a mental health issue in the past year. Additionally, high school students were more likely to have seen a doctor or dentist in the last year.

Significant declines / issues

Since 2013 Summit County adolescents have seen statistically significant declines in several key indicators as well.

- **E-cigarettes (vaping)** – The explosive growth of e-cigarettes may be the most serious public health threat the nation has faced since the beginning of the overdose crisis. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, e-cigarette use nationwide grew by 900% between 2011 and 2015. In Summit County, the



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question of e-cigarette use wasn't even included in the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, though it was added to the 2018 survey. In 2018, 16% of middle school students and 42% of high school students had tried e-cigarettes at least once. Nearly 9% of middle school and 25% of high school students say they used an e-cigarette in the past 30 days. More troubling is how early in life some students begin vaping. Nearly 3% of middle school students say they began before age 11, while 4% of high school students say they began before age 13. To put the use of e-cigarettes in perspective, in the 2018 YRBS just 2% of middle school students and 26% of high school students say they have ever smoked a traditional cigarette; far below the percentages of teens who have ever vaped.

- **Obesity, diet, and physical activity-** Obesity rates for both middle and high school students rose from 2013 to 2018. For middle school students, obesity rose from 12% to 15%, while high school students saw obesity rise from 13% to 16%. High school students were more likely to describe themselves as overweight in 2018 than in 2013 (31% and 33%, respectively). Middle school students saw a more modest increase (from 29% to 30%), but that change was not statistically significant.

Just over one-third of middle school and about one-fourth of high school students eat breakfast every day. Since eating breakfast daily is thought to reduce the risk for obesity and insulin resistance syndrome, low rates of youth eating breakfast daily are cause for concern. In Summit County at least, few middle and high school students eat breakfast daily, and the figures for both groups grew worse between 2013 and 2018. At the same time, both middle and high school students saw increases in the percentage of students who ate fast food at least once in the week before the survey. Among middle school students, the percentage who ate fast food at least once rose from 67% in 2013 to 71% in 2018. Among high school students, the percentage who ate fast food at least once rose from 70% in 2013 to 75% in 2018.

The percent of middle school students who met the recommended level of physical activity dropped from 48% in 2013 to 44% in 2018. The rate for high school students remained about the same at 42%. A related issue is the percentage of teens who either watch television or use computers or video games at least

three hours each. As mentioned in the improvement section above, the percent watching 3 hours or more of television per day went down for both middle and high school students. Unfortunately, it appears that the use of computers and video games is taking the place of television watching for teens. Both middle and high school students saw big increases in the percent using computers or playing games at least 3 hours per day. In 2013, 41% of middle school and 40% of high school students spent at least 3 hours per day on such devices. By 2018, those figures rose to just under 50% for each group.

Findings for LGBTQ high school students

One troubling set of findings from the 2018 YRBS were the self-reported experiences of LGBTQ high school students (sexual orientation was not asked of middle school youth). In the 2018 YRBS, LGBTQ youth were significantly more likely than heterosexual youth to say they:

- Felt unsafe at, going to, or coming home from school in the past 30 days
- Were physically hurt (on purpose) by someone they were dating
- Were forced to do sexual things that they didn't want to do
- Were bullied in school, away from school, and electronically
- Purposely hurt themselves
- Felt so sad that they stopped normal activities
- Seriously considered suicide
- Attempted suicide

All told, LGBTQ youth were at least 2-3 times more likely than heterosexual youth to have experienced violence, self-harm, depressive sadness, or suicide-related behavior (see Figure 1).

LGBTQ youth were also more likely than heterosexual youth to say they have used cigarettes, e-cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, or a hard drug such as heroin, methamphetamine, or cocaine at least once.

Forced sexual experiences

An even more troubling finding is that those who have been forced to do something sexual are more likely to have experienced violence, bullying, self-harm, depressive sadness, or suicide-related behavior than others are, whatever their orientation. Among those who have had a forced sexual experience, LGBTQ students are also more likely than heterosexual students to have experienced violence, bullying, self-harm, depressive sadness, or suicide-related behavior (see Figure 2).

In fact, LGBTQ youth who have been forced to do something sexual have the most worrying outcomes on these questions of any demographic group in the survey. For example, 10% of heterosexual youth without a forced sexual experience say they seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months. That figure rises to 36% for heterosexual youth with a forced sexual experience. Just over 33% of LGBTQ youth without a forced sexual experience say they seriously considered suicide in the

past 12 months; a figure that rises to 62% for LGBTQ youth who have ever had a forced sexual experience.

The same relationship exists with substance use and sexual activity. Any youth who ever had a forced sexual experience is significantly more likely to use marijuana and other drugs, and also more likely to have ever had sexual intercourse and to be currently sexually active than those who didn't, whatever their sexual orientation. As with the violence-related questions, rates of substance use and sexual activity are higher among LGBTQ youth with a forced sexual experience than heterosexual youth with a forced sexual experience.

One last finding related to forced sexual experiences is the gender of the victims. Nearly 80% of heterosexual high school students and 85% of LGBTQ high school students who have ever been forced to do something sexual were female. Among high school students who were never forced to do anything sexual, more than half of heterosexuals were female, while two-thirds of LGBTQ high school students were female.

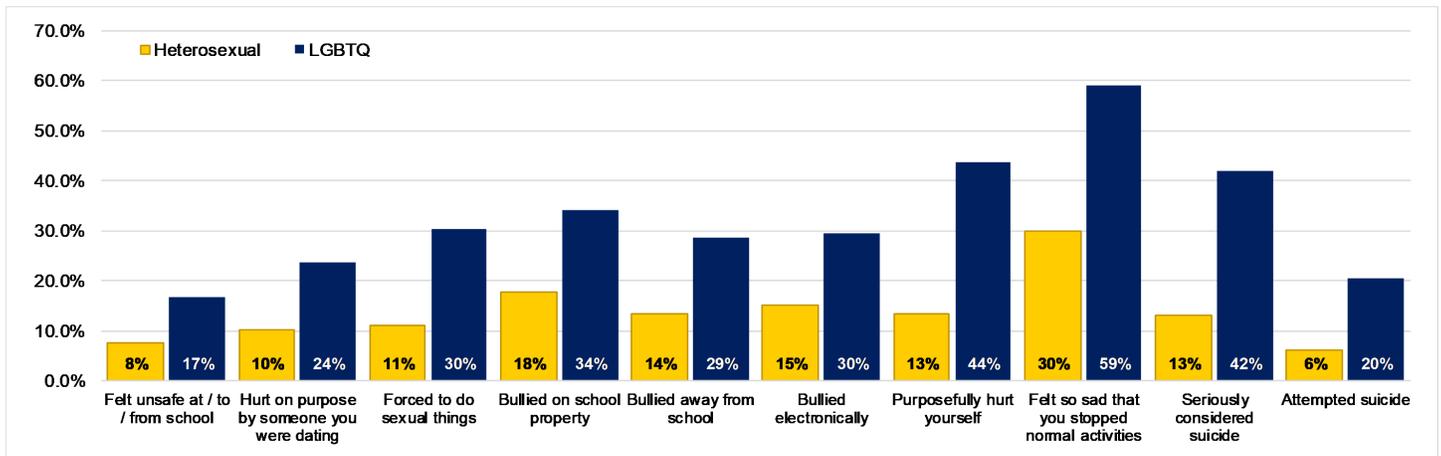


Figure 1: Sexual Orientation, Violence, Bullying, and Depressive Sadness, YRBS 2018 Source: 2018 YRBS

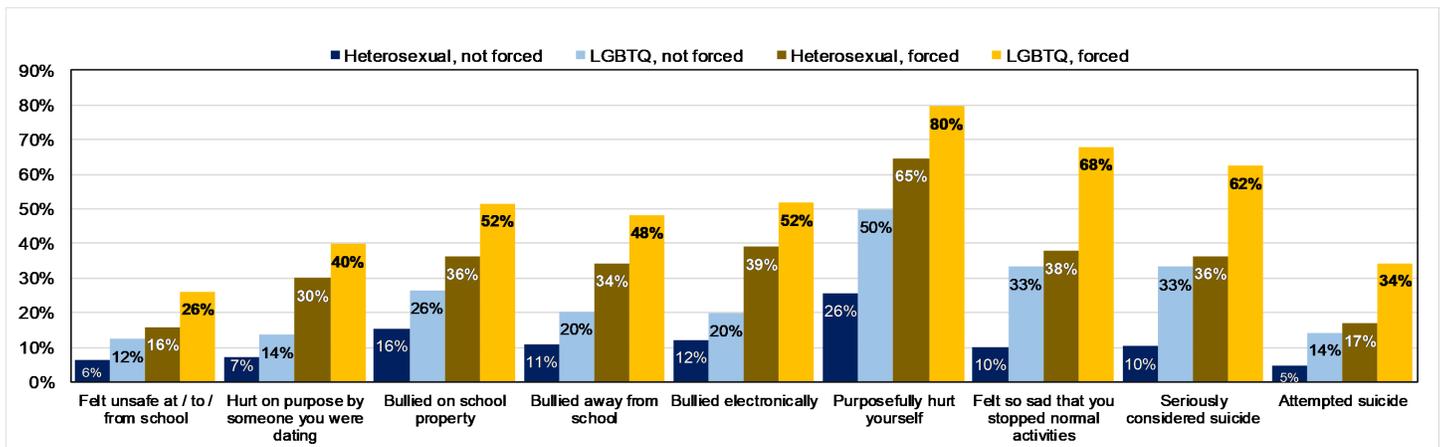


Figure 2: Forced Sexual Experience, Violence, Bullying, and Depressive Sadness, YRBS 2018 Source: 2018 YRBS

Drug Use Among Teens

Alcohol and other substance abuse is another major focal point of the YRBS. The issue of teen use and abuse of substances is especially important because the teen years are often the time when patterns of abuse begin to develop.

Figures 3 and 4 below show the percentage of both middle and high school students who have ever used each of the substances mentioned. Nearly one-in-four middle school students used alcohol at least once in 2013; a figure which fell to just 16% by 2018. The same pattern holds for each of the substances students were asked about (Figure 3). All of the decreases were statistically significant. Only the use of synthetic drugs remained unchanged at about 2%.

Figure 4 presents the same data for high school students. Like middle schoolers, self-reported substance abuse among high school students fell significantly for all substances students were asked about. Though all the declines are good news, the drop in the percent of students who report using prescription pain relievers without a prescription may be the most important. The percent who say they ever used prescription pain killers fell from 16% to just 6% between 2013 and 2018.

For many, the pathway to addiction begins with the abuse of prescription opioids. A decline in the abuse of these drugs among middle and high school students means significantly fewer teens are at risk of becoming trapped in the deadly cycle of opiate addiction as they get older.

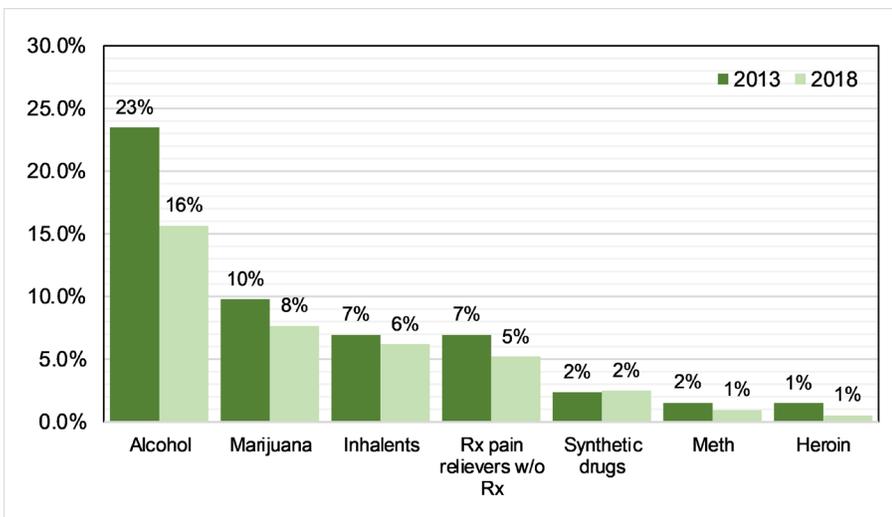


Figure 3: Percent of Middle School Students Ever Using Each Substance, Summit County, 2013 & 2018

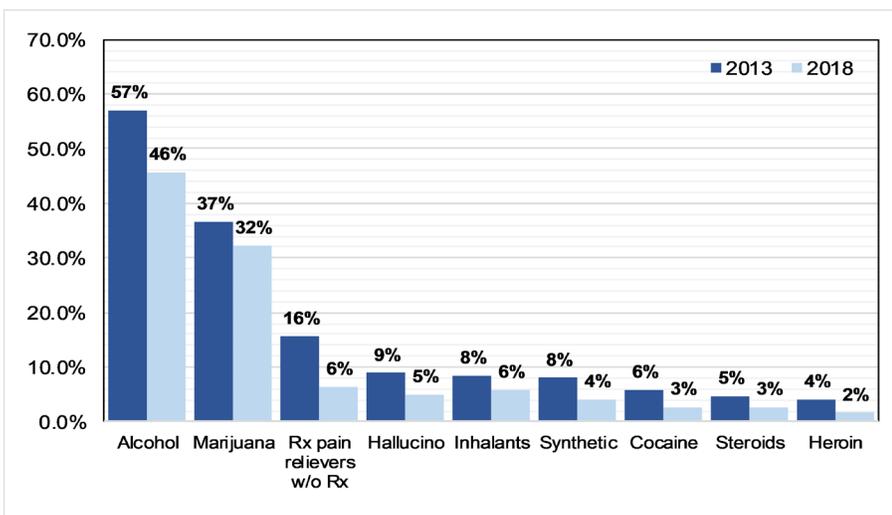


Figure 4: Percent of High School Students Ever Using Each Substance, Summit County, 2013 & 2018