

Health disparities in substance use among Pennsylvania youth

State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup, 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS

Data from the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) indicate the importance of taking an intersectionality approach to the prevention of substance use among school-aged youth. Addressing disparities in substance use through the lens of intersectionality means that prevention programming must account for the interconnected nature of how youth identify – such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Data from this report show that when youth identify with multiple minority groups, such as a racial minority and sexual minority, they may be at even greater risk of substance use compared to their non-minority counterparts.

Surveillance data is an important tool in the prevention of substance use among school-aged youth. We must continue to improve our surveillance systems by incorporating measures that include vulnerable and underserved populations, particularly when considering the impact of intersecting minority identities on reducing health disparities.

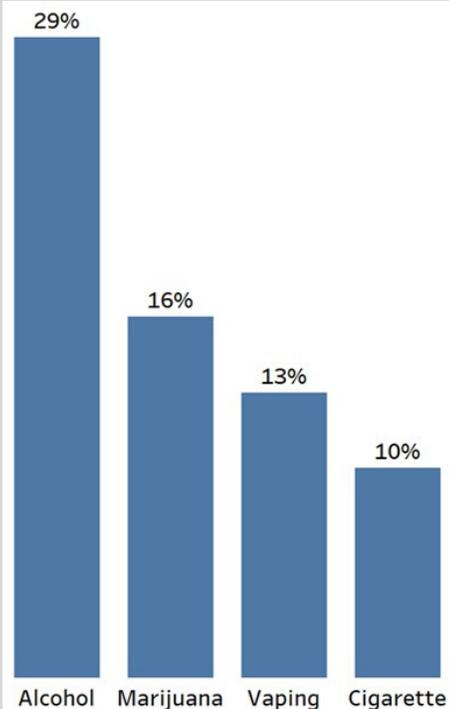
BACKGROUND

Health disparities are differences in disease experienced by vulnerable populations [1]. While substance use is related to a variety of factors, some groups are at higher risk than others. This includes individuals who identify as racial and ethnic minorities as well as sexual and gender minorities. Substance use is often adopted as a coping behavior in response to excessive stress linked to experiences of discrimination, bias, and stigma [2]. Although 77% of Pennsylvania residents identify as non-Hispanic White, 8% identify as Hispanic or Latino and 12% as Black or African American [3]. Additionally, one in twenty Pennsylvania residents identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual [4]. Given the population-level impact of addressing health disparities in substance use prevention and treatment, effective surveillance of trends is necessary.

This data brief highlights what is known about substance use by race, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities in Pennsylvania.

Substance use starts early

Substance use often begins early in life and surveillance data among school-aged youth are important for prevention efforts. In Pennsylvania, two surveys that provide surveillance data among school-aged youth include the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) and the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). The PAYS is a biennial survey administered to middle school and high school students and questions on this survey can be used to estimate recent use of a variety of substances, including alcohol, marijuana, electronic vapor products, and cigarettes. The YRBSS also monitors alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in high school youth and is administered in every U.S. state. In addition to asking questions about race and ethnicity that are also included on the PAYS, the YRBSS includes questions about sexual orientation.



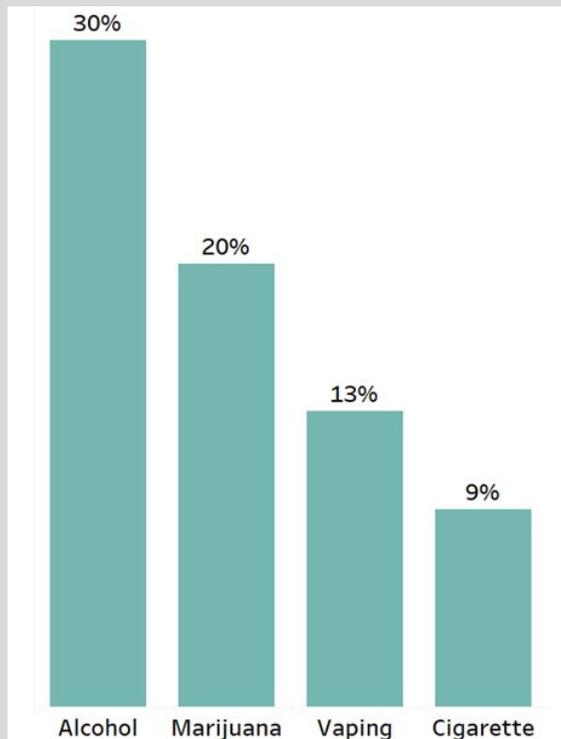
Data source: 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS)

Figure 1: Substance use over the past 30 days in PA Youth in high school (PAYS)

Figure 1 provides substance use over the past 30 days among high school students in Pennsylvania. In 2017, three in ten high school students in Pennsylvania reported recent alcohol consumption, one in six reported recent marijuana use, and one in eight reported recent electronic vapor product use [5].

Figure 2: Substance use over the past 30 days in PA youth in high school (YRBSS)

Figure 2 displays data from the 2017 Pennsylvania YRBSS, showing comparable estimates of past 30-day substance use when compared with the 2017 PAYS data. In 2017, three in ten high school students reported alcohol use and one in five students reported marijuana use in the past 30 days [6].



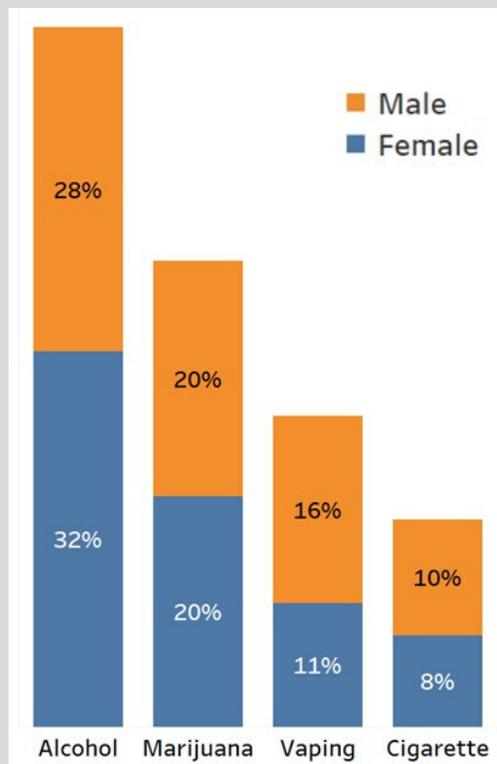
Data source: 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

In 2017, both the PAYS and YRBSS provided comparable estimates for past 30-day substance use among school-aged youth in Pennsylvania. Only the YRBSS, however, included questions related to sexual orientation. The remainder of this report utilizes YRBSS data to highlight substance use disparities among racial/ethnic minorities as well as sexual minorities.

Substance use differs by gender

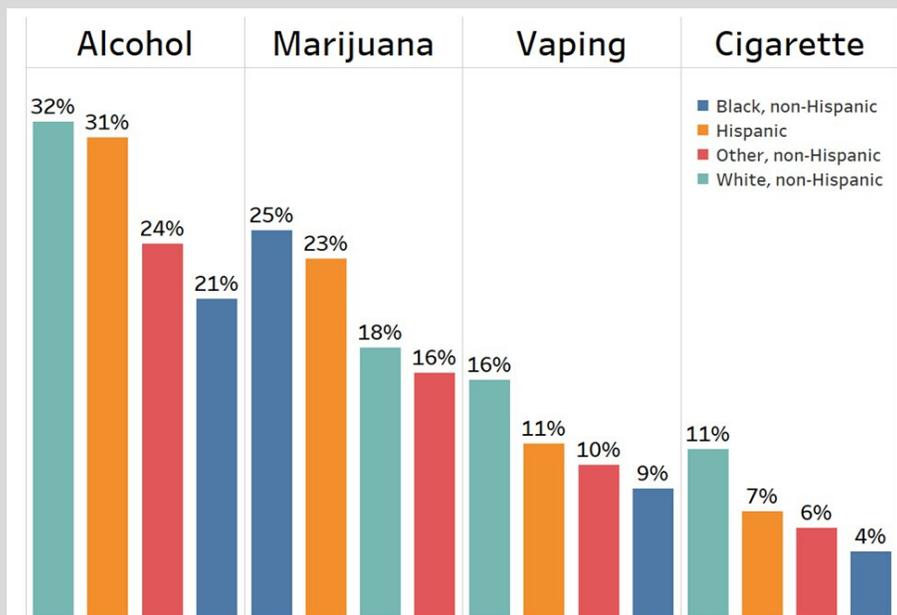
Figure 3: Substance use over the past 30 days in PA youth in high school by gender

In 2017, substance use prevalence differed by gender for alcohol, vaping, and cigarette use (Figure 3). In the 2017 Pennsylvania YRBSS, more females reported alcohol consumption in the past 30 days (32%) compared to males (28%). Vaping and cigarette smoking prevalence was higher in males, with 16% reporting vaping and 10% reporting cigarette smoking in the past 30 days (compared to 11% and 8% in females, respectively) [6].



Data source: 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

Substance use differs by race and ethnicity



Data source: 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

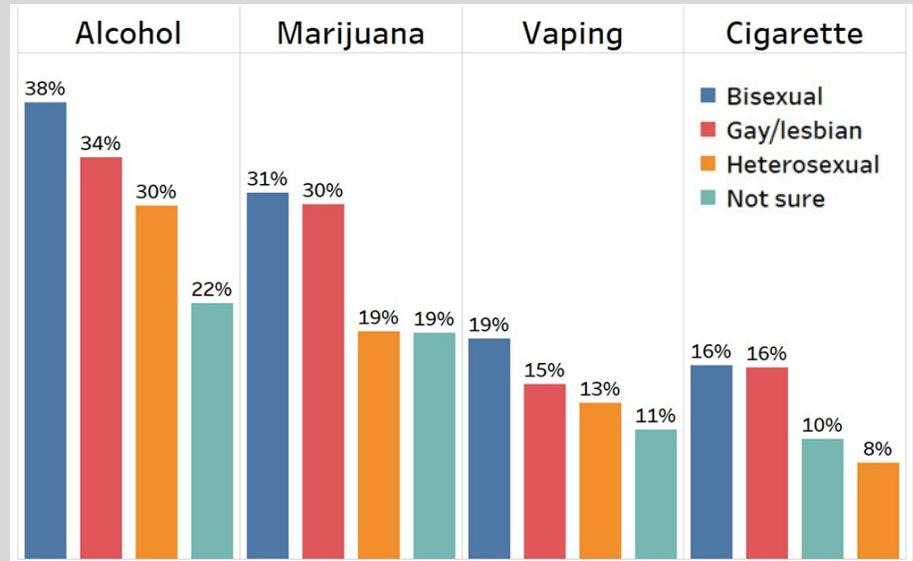
Figure 4: Substance use over the past 30 days in PA youth in high school by race and ethnicity

In the 2017 Pennsylvania YRBSS, alcohol use, electronic vapor product use, and cigarette smoking prevalence in the past 30 days was highest in White, non-Hispanic youth (Figure 4). Black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic youth reported a higher prevalence of marijuana use in the past 30 days [6].

Sexual minorities have higher rates of substance use

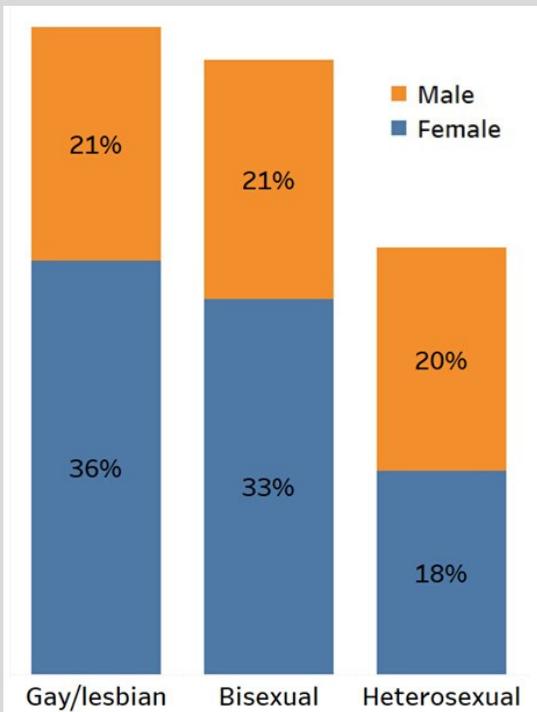
Figure 5: Substance use over the past 30 days in PA youth in high school by sexual identity

In 2017, sexual minority youth reported a higher prevalence of substance use in the past 30 days compared to heterosexual youth (Figure 5). Bisexual youth had a higher prevalence of alcohol, marijuana, and electronic vapor product use compared to gay, lesbian and heterosexual youth [6].



Data source: 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

Intersecting identities make youth more vulnerable to substance use



Data source: 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

Figure 6: Marijuana use in the past 30 days in PA youth in high school

In 2017, more youth who identified as both female and a sexual minority reported marijuana use in the past 30 days compared to their male counterparts (Figure 6). Nearly twice as many females who identified as lesbians reported marijuana use in the last 30 days (36%) compared to males who identified as gay (21%). Females who identified as bisexual also had a higher prevalence of marijuana use in the last 30 days (33%) compared to males who identified as bisexual (21%) [6].

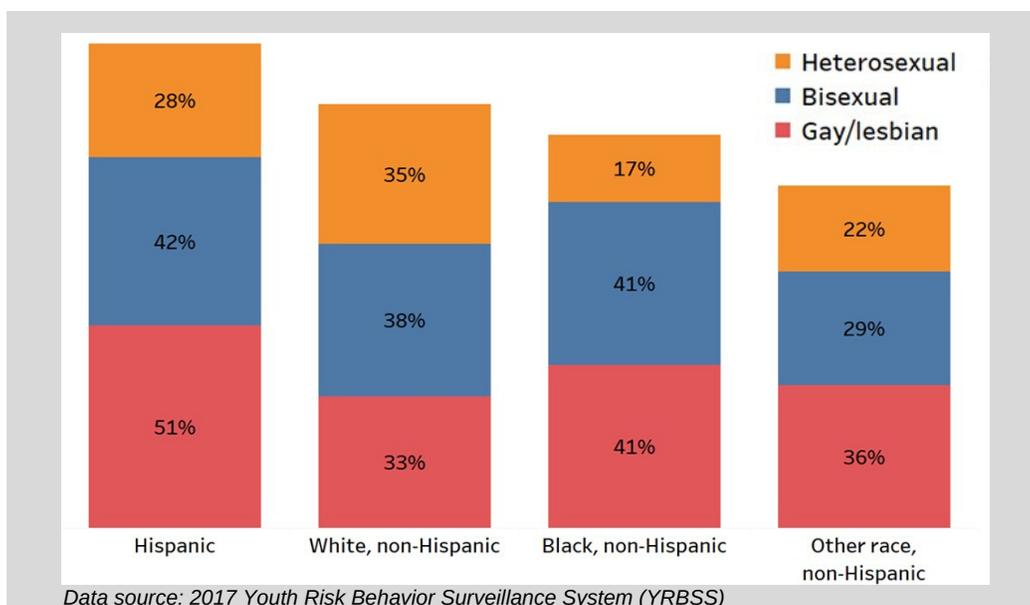


Figure 7: Alcohol use in the past 30 days in PA youth in high school

Among Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic other race high school youth, those who identified as a sexual minority had higher reported rates of 30-day alcohol use compared to their heterosexual peers. In contrast, White, non-Hispanic youth who identified as a sexual minority reported similar rates of 30-days substance use as their heterosexual peers. The highest reported 30-day alcohol use was among Hispanic youth who identified as gay or lesbian (51%), followed by Black, non-Hispanic youth who identified as gay or lesbian (41%) [6].

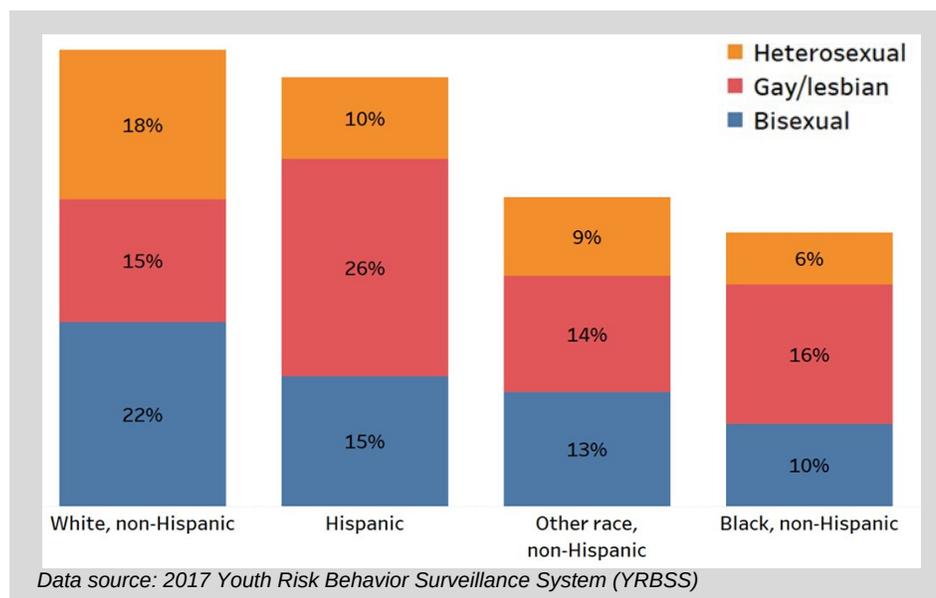


Figure 8: Electronic vapor product use in the past 30 days in PA youth in high school

In 2017, non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic students who identified as gay or lesbian had a higher prevalence of electronic vapor product use in the past 30 days compared to their heterosexual peers (Figure 8). The highest reported 30-day electronic vapor product use was among Hispanic youth who identified as gay or lesbian (26%), followed by White, non-Hispanic students who identified as bisexual (22%) and Black, non-Hispanic students who identified as gay or lesbian (16%) [6].

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6. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

PENNSYLVANIA SEOW

The State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) is supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. SEOW members represent both governmental and non-governmental agencies from across Pennsylvania. The goal of the SEOW is to inform and enhance state and community decisions regarding substance misuse and mental illness prevention programs, practices, and policies.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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