



Rhode Island Data Brief

Youth at Risk: 2011 Rhode Island High School Sexual Orientation & Health Risks

Purpose: Over 10% of Rhode Island (RI) public high school students were lesbian, gay, bisexual or unsure (LGBU) of their sexual identity, and there is interest in knowing if they were at greater threat from health risk behaviors than their heterosexual peers. Consequently, this brief examines differences in health risks for LGBU and heterosexual high school students, and whether those risks have improved or worsened over time (2007 to 2011). Twenty four measures are evaluated, comprising eight areas of vulnerability (i.e., violence, mental health, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sex, injury, and weight). The findings are intended to inform policy-makers and stimulate further research.

Data source: All data are from RI's Youth Risk Behavior Survey,¹ part of a biennial survey of public high school students nationwide on the major causes of disease and injury morbidity and mortality.

'LGBU' defined: In the survey, students were asked about their sexual orientation. Their responses were then parsed into two categories: 1) 'LGBU' students reporting they were lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'unsure,' and 2) 'heterosexual' students.

Using the data: The differences in the health risks for LGBU and heterosexual students may be statistically 'significant' or not. In this brief, 'significance' was determined at the 95% confidence level.² Lastly, the 24 risk measures are all negative indicators, so lower/declining values are preferred.

Findings: LGBU students had significantly higher health risks on 22 of 24 measures in 2011 than heterosexual students. In 2011, 10.5% of RI high schoolers were LGBU, compared to 9.9% in 2007; however, the increase was not large enough to be statistically significant. Compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBU students were more likely to be female (61% vs. 49%), minority (39% vs. 31%), and to have poor academic grades ('Ds' & 'Fs'; 15% vs. 8%). LGBU students were also more likely to have a physical disability (23% vs. 11%) or emotional disability (29% vs. 13%).

Violence was much more prevalent among LGBU students. The physical fighting rate was higher for this group in 2011 (34% vs. 22%), and the dating violence rate was over three times higher (22% vs. 7%). The 2011 forced intercourse rate for LGBU students was four times that of their heterosexual peers (20% vs. 5%).

Mental health risks were higher for LGBU students. Over twice as many of these students felt 'depressed' in 2011 (49% vs. 22%), over three times as many planned their own suicide (30% vs. 9%), and their attempted suicide rate was four times higher (29% vs. 7%).

Tobacco use was more common among LGBU students. Their current smoking rate declined from 35% in 2007 to 22% in 2011; however, that rate was over twice that for heterosexual students in 2011 (22% vs. 10%). Likewise, the rate of use of any tobacco product among LGBU students declined from 39% in 2007 to 26% in 2011, but remained higher than the heterosexual rate in 2011 (26% vs. 17%).

Alcohol use was higher among LGBU students. Their current drinking rate declined from 59% in 2007 to 44% in 2011, but remained higher than the heterosexual rate in 2011 (44% vs. 33%). Binge drinking was also higher in the LGBU population in 2011 (29% vs. 17%).

Drug use was more widespread among LGBU students. They were more likely to use marijuana than their heterosexual peers in 2011 (36% vs. 25%), over four times as likely to have tried cocaine (19% vs. 4%), and over twice as likely to have abused prescription drugs (29% vs. 12%).

Sexual activity was more prevalent among LGBU students. The current sexual activity rate was higher for LGBU students in 2011 (39% vs. 29%). They were also more likely to have had multiple sexual partners (19% vs. 10%), and to have had unprotected sex (62% vs. 38%).

Injury risks were greater for LGBU students. Their rate for not wearing seat belts was higher in 2011 (16% vs. 9%), and they were over twice as likely to drink and drive (14% vs. 6%).

Weight-related risks were higher for LGBU students. Not only was their obesity rate higher in 2011 (17% vs. 10%), but they were also more likely to not get enough exercise (74% vs. 51%).

In RI, LGBU students are clearly at risk from a host of factors compromising their current and future health status. Addressing their negative health disparities is therefore key to enabling these students to lead long and healthy lives.

In 2011, RI high school students who were lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure (LGBU) had significantly higher health risks on 22 of 24 measures than their heterosexual peers. From 2007-2011, three risk measures for LGBU students improved significantly (i.e., current smoking, any tobacco use, and current drinking), and no measure worsened.

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¹ The RI-YRBS is jointly sponsored by the Department of Health, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals

² As the RI-YRBS is a sample survey, if the 95% Confidence Intervals of two values do not overlap, one may conclude (with 95% certainty) that there was a 'real' (statistically 'significant') difference between the two values (i.e., the difference was not likely due to sampling bias).

Figure 1: RI 2011 High School Health Risks by Sexual Orientation
* statistically significant differences

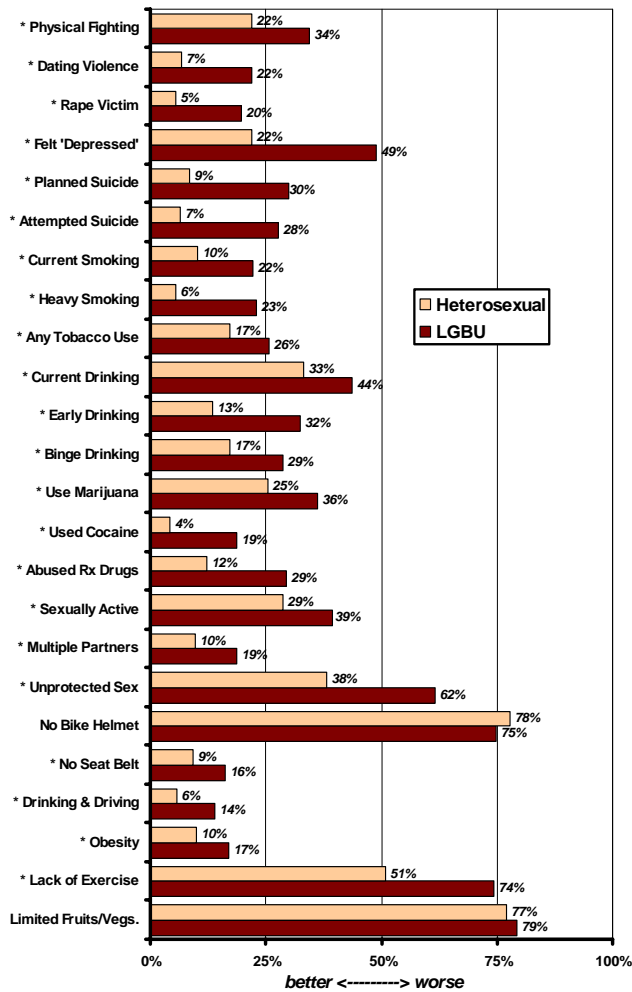


Figure 2: RI 2007 & 2011 H.S. Health Risks for LGBU Students
* statistically significant changes

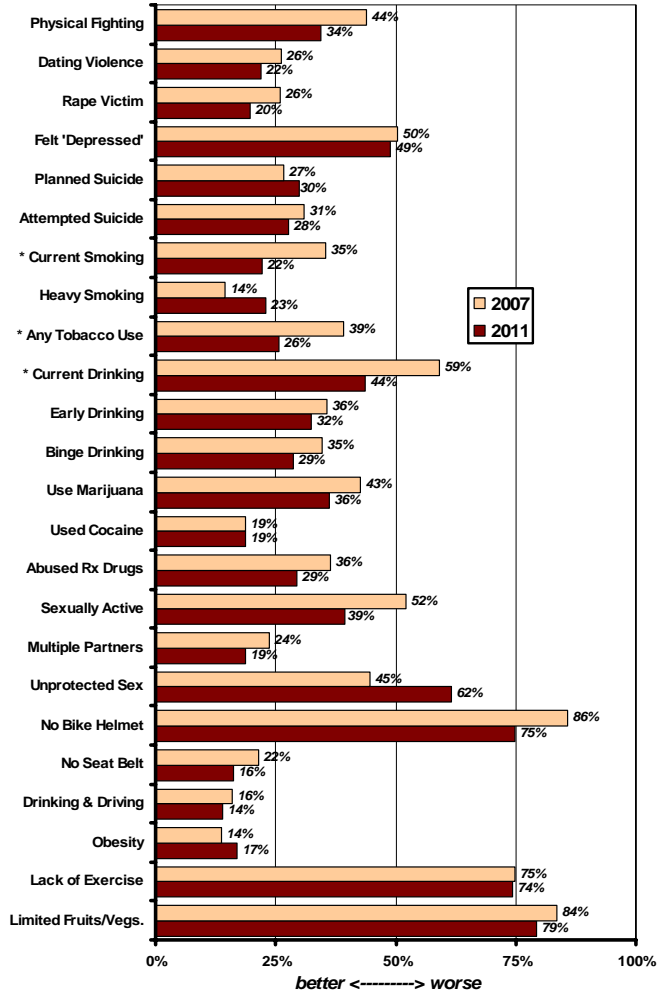


Table 1: Rhode Island High School Health Risks Data by Sexual Orientation

Measure	Description	2011				2009		2007	
		Hetero-sexual	LGBU	Heterosexual 95% CIs	LGBU 95% CIs	LGBU	LGBU 95% CIs	LGBU	LGBU 95% CIs
VIOLENCE	Physical Fighting	22.0%	34.4%	20.5% 23.5%	29.4% 39.5%	35.1%	28.9% 41.4%	43.8%	37.4% 50.3%
	Dating Violence	6.6%	21.8%	5.7% 7.5%	17.5% 26.2%	18.9%	13.9% 23.8%	26.2%	19.8% 32.5%
	Rape Victim	5.4%	19.7%	4.5% 6.2%	15.6% 23.8%	16.2%	11.3% 21.0%	25.9%	19.8% 32.1%
MENTAL	Felt 'Depressed'	21.9%	49.0%	20.4% 23.3%	43.6% 54.3%	43.8%	37.4% 50.2%	50.3%	42.4% 58.2%
	Planned Suicide	8.6%	29.8%	7.6% 9.6%	24.9% 34.7%	29.5%	23.4% 35.6%	26.8%	20.6% 33.0%
	Attempted Suicide	6.6%	27.8%	5.6% 7.5%	22.7% 32.8%	22.3%	16.5% 28.1%	31.0%	24.0% 37.9%
TOBACCO	Current Smoking	10.2%	22.1%	9.1% 11.4%	17.5% 26.7%	27.6%	21.2% 34.1%	35.3%	28.1% 42.6%
	Heavy Smoking	5.6%	23.1%	2.8% 8.4%	13.1% 33.1%	6.4%	0.0% 12.9%	14.5%	5.7% 23.2%
	Any Tobacco Use	17.2%	25.8%	15.7% 18.6%	20.8% 30.8%	29.3%	22.8% 35.8%	39.3%	31.7% 46.8%
ALCOHOL	Current Drinking	33.2%	43.5%	31.4% 34.9%	37.9% 49.1%	34.1%	27.7% 40.6%	59.0%	51.5% 66.5%
	Early Drinking	13.5%	32.3%	12.3% 14.7%	27.4% 37.3%	23.9%	18.3% 29.4%	35.6%	28.8% 42.4%
	Binge Drinking	17.2%	28.7%	15.8% 18.6%	23.7% 33.6%	20.3%	14.9% 25.7%	34.8%	27.8% 41.7%
DRUGS	Use Marijuana	25.3%	36.2%	23.7% 27.0%	31.0% 41.5%	35.5%	29.0% 42.0%	42.7%	35.3% 50.0%
	Used Cocaine	4.4%	18.8%	3.6% 5.1%	14.8% 22.8%	18.0%	12.8% 23.3%	18.7%	13.2% 24.3%
	Abused Rx Drugs	12.3%	29.4%	11.0% 13.5%	24.6% 34.2%	36.2%	29.8% 42.6%	36.3%	29.5% 43.2%
SEX	Sexually Active	28.8%	39.4%	27.0% 30.6%	33.4% 45.4%	43.6%	36.5% 50.6%	52.1%	44.3% 59.9%
	Multiple Partners	9.6%	18.6%	8.5% 10.8%	14.0% 23.3%	23.7%	17.5% 29.9%	23.8%	17.4% 30.2%
	Unprotected Sex	38.3%	61.6%	34.7% 41.9%	51.9% 71.3%	55.7%	44.7% 66.7%	44.6%	33.6% 55.6%
INJURY	No Bike Helmet	77.9%	74.9%	76.1% 79.7%	68.8% 81.0%	82.2%	75.9% 88.6%	85.9%	79.4% 92.4%
	No Seat Belt	9.3%	16.3%	8.2% 10.3%	12.5% 20.1%	20.8%	15.4% 26.2%	21.6%	17.3% 25.8%
	Drinking & Driving	5.6%	13.9%	4.8% 6.5%	10.2% 17.5%	10.5%	6.5% 14.5%	16.0%	10.6% 21.5%
WEIGHT	Obesity	10.0%	17.0%	9.0% 11.1%	12.8% 21.2%	17.9%	12.8% 23.0%	13.7%	8.8% 18.6%
	Lack of Exercise	50.8%	74.4%	49.0% 52.6%	69.8% 79.1%	71.4%	65.3% 77.5%	74.7%	68.6% 80.8%
	Limited Fruits/Veg.	77.2%	79.4%	75.6% 78.7%	75.0% 83.8%	73.3%	67.5% 79.1%	83.6%	78.3% 88.8%