Survey—Many High School Students Have Experienced Violence

About half of high school students experienced at least 1 type of violence during the previous year, according to data from 9080 US students who participated in the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

The survey asked about 4 types of violence: physical fighting or being threatened with a weapon, physical dating violence, sexual violence, and bullying. Nearly 30% reported experiencing 1 type of violence in the last year, about 11% said they faced 2 types of violence, and about 5% were subjected to 3 or more types. Female students were almost twice as likely as male students to say they experienced 3 or more types of violence. Students who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were about 3 times as likely to report being subjected to 3 or more types of violence than heterosexual students. Students who were unsure of their sexual identity were about twice as likely as heterosexual students to say they experienced at least 3 types of violence.

Risky behaviors or high-risk health conditions were most prevalent among students who were subjected to 3 or more types of violence. Among them, about one-third said they missed school because they were concerned about their safety. Thirteen percent reported bringing a gun to school, more than one-third smoked, and about two-thirds used electronic vaping products. About 60% drank alcohol—more than double the proportion of students who hadn’t experienced violence. Nearly one-third reported using prescription pain medications compared with 3% of students with no violent experiences. These students also were about 7 times more likely than those not subjected to violence to have had multiple sexual partners during the previous 3 months. About 70% reported having suicidal thoughts or behavior.

Preventing violence can reduce long-term harm to students’ health and well-being. “Violence is preventable using proven approaches that address individual, family, and environmental risks,” the authors wrote.

Sexual Minorities Have Greater COVID-19 Risk Factors

Gay, lesbian, or bisexual adults have higher rates than heterosexual people of health conditions that increase the risk of developing severe COVID-19, according to national survey data.

Currently, US COVID-19 surveillance systems don’t collect data on patients’ sexual orientation or gender identity—a concern that advocacy groups and health care organizations raised during a meeting with the CDC in November 2020. To help fill the information gap, the CDC analyzed Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data from 2017 to 2019 to determine the prevalence in this population of conditions that raise the risk of severe COVID-19. About 5% of the survey’s respondents identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Too few respondents identified as transgender or nonbinary to reliably estimate their COVID-19 risk factors, the authors noted.

Overall, people who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual had higher self-reported rates of asthma, cancer, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, kidney disease, obesity, smoking, and stroke than heterosexual individuals. Some of these conditions were more prevalent among individuals who are in both sexual and racial or ethnic minority groups. The authors suggested that gay, lesbian, or bisexual people may encounter discrimination or stigmatization that increases their vulnerability to illness and limits their ability to have economic security, access to health care, and supportive relationships. They also noted that these biases may be greater toward people in both sexual and racial or ethnic minority groups, exacerbating their risk of developing severe COVID-19.

“Collecting data on sexual orientation in COVID-19 surveillance and other studies would improve knowledge about disparities in infection and adverse outcomes by sexual orientation, thereby informing more equitable responses to the pandemic,” the authors wrote. – Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.