

**Risk Behaviors and Sexual Identity Among High School Students:
Results for Frederick County from the 2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)**

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Executive Summary

According to the 2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), **26%** of students sexually identified as **other than Heterosexual** (YRBS 2021: Q65). Prevalence is two and a half times higher than in 2013 (10%), the first year of this report (YRBS 2013: Q101).

The most frequently selected identity was **Bisexual (11%)**, while **4%** identified as **Gay or Lesbian**. The remaining students described themselves as **Other (5%), Questioning (4%), and Not Sure (2%)**.

Among all students, **3.4%** identified as **Transgender** (YRBS 2021: QN88). Of all Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) students, 11% identified as Transgender. Within Other/Questioning students, 18% identified as Transgender.

Results in this report refer to the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) students. In YRBS 2021, Other/Questioning students were added as a separate analysis category. Since their trends followed LGB students, their data is not specifically presented. Transgender students were not included in sexual identity profiles by the Maryland Department of Health; however, **92% of Transgender students also identified as LGB or Other/Questioning**, so results can be reasonably generalized to that population as well.

Overall, LGB students continue to have more personal challenges and risk behaviors compared to their Heterosexual counterparts. The following areas have the largest disparities:

- LGB students are **twice** as likely to suffer from **mental health issues**, including feeling sad or hopeless nearly daily (62.2% vs. 30.5%) and attempted suicide (26.0% vs. 14.1%). (YRBS 2021: QN25, QN28)
 - They are also **twice** as likely to have ever **lived with** someone who was **mentally ill** (56.7% vs. 29.3%). (YRBS 2021: QN112)
- **Physical health** is also a concern, as LGB students are nearly **twice** as likely to have a **disability** or long-term health problem that keeps them from doing everyday activities (14.9% vs. 7.7%). (YRBS 2021: QN107)
- Parental ties are weaker for LGB students: they are over **twice** as likely to report that a **parent** or other adult in their home most of the time or always **swore at them, insulted them, or put them down** (21.6% vs. 9.5%). (YRBS 2021: QN109)
- Bullying is of greater concern for LGB students, as nearly **triple** have been **bullied on school property** (31.3% vs. 13.1%) and **double** have been **electronically bullied** (28.9% vs. 13.5%) (YRBS 2021: QN23, QN24)
- While LGB students are generally more sexually active, they are nearly **five times** as likely to have had **sexual intercourse** for the first time **before age 13** years (6.0% vs. 1.3%). (YRBS 2021: QN58)
- Regarding tobacco use, LGB students are **twice** as likely to currently **smoke cigarettes** (5.1% vs. 2.6%) and to have first **tried smoking before age 13** (8.0% vs. 4.2%). (YRBS 2021: QN32, QN31)
- Although the disparity is not as large as with tobacco, LGB students are over **50% more likely** to currently **use cannabis** (20.6% vs. 12.8%) and have had their **first drink before age 13** (18.9% vs. 11.5%). (YRBS 2021: QN47, QN40)
- LGB students misused **prescription pain medication** (20.0% vs. 11.4%) at nearly **twice** the rate of Heterosexual students. They were also **three times** as likely to have ever used **cocaine** (4.0% vs. 1.5%) or **MDMA** (3.9% vs. 1.3%). (YRBS 2021: QN49, QN50, QN54)

Methodology

The 2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was administered to 10 high schools in Frederick County to students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. 3,158 questionnaires were usable for Sexual Identity analysis after data editing. Maryland Department of Health (MDH) performed t-test analysis on the questions to determine statistical significance at 95% confidence between Heterosexual students (n=2,342) and Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual (LGB) students (n=468).

Other/Questioning students (n=294), in addition to LGB students, was added as an analysis category in 2021. Other/Questioning data are not presented separately in this report, as their responses largely follow LGB responses. Transgender students (n=110) were not specifically included in sexual identity groups per MDH analysis, though the vast majority of them identified as LGB or Other/Questioning (n=101). Therefore, similar conclusions may be reasonably drawn about this population.

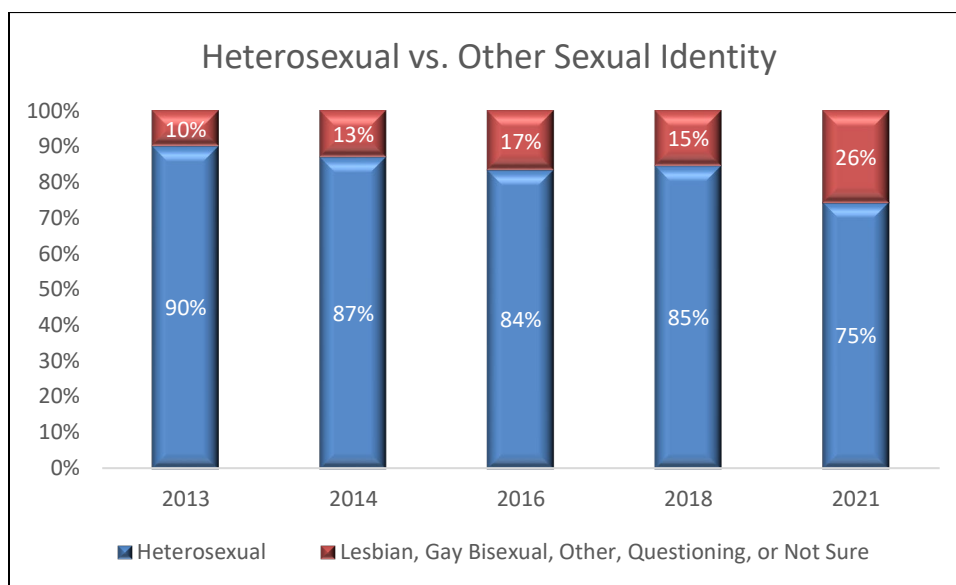
Data used in this report is publicly available via the MDH website:

<https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/State-Level-Data%2c-2021-2022.aspx>

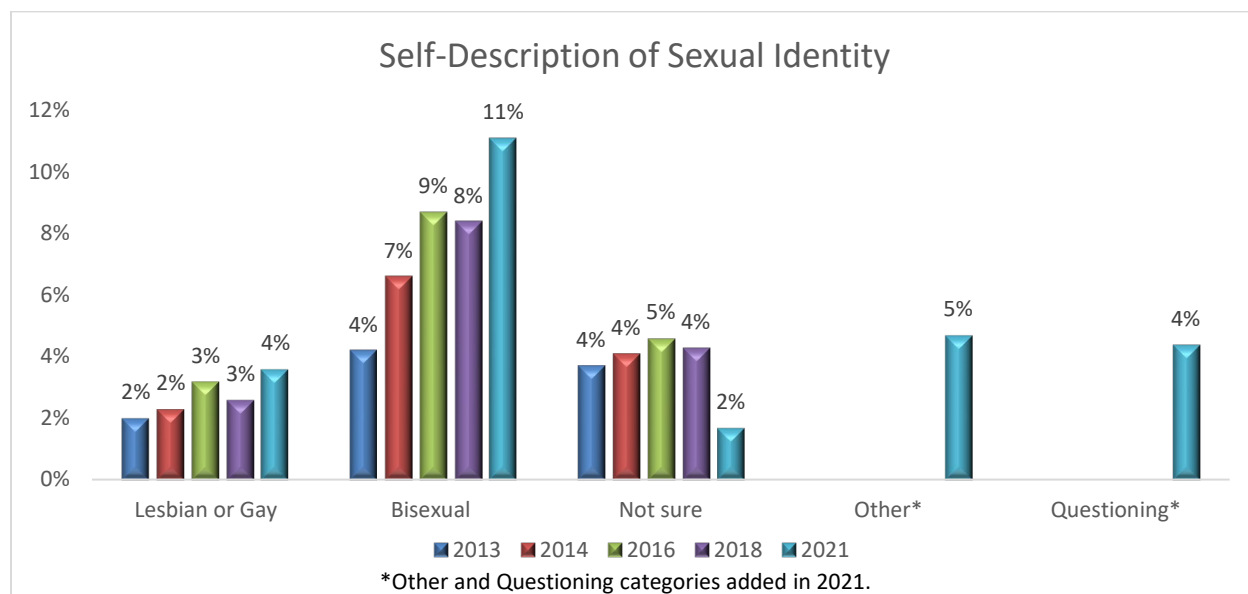
Prevalence of Sexual and Gender Identity

Currently, **26% of students identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other, Questioning, or Not Sure**. The prevalence of these sexual identities has **increased over time**.

- In **2013**, only **10%** of students identified as LGB or Not Sure (Other and Questioning categories were added in 2021).
- Since 2013, **Gay/Lesbian** identity has **doubled**, and **Bisexual** identity increased by nearly **three times**.
- When the categories were added in 2021, **5%** chose **Other** and **4%** chose **Questioning**.
 - Meanwhile, **Not Sure** was **halved** once these other options were offered.



2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Q65

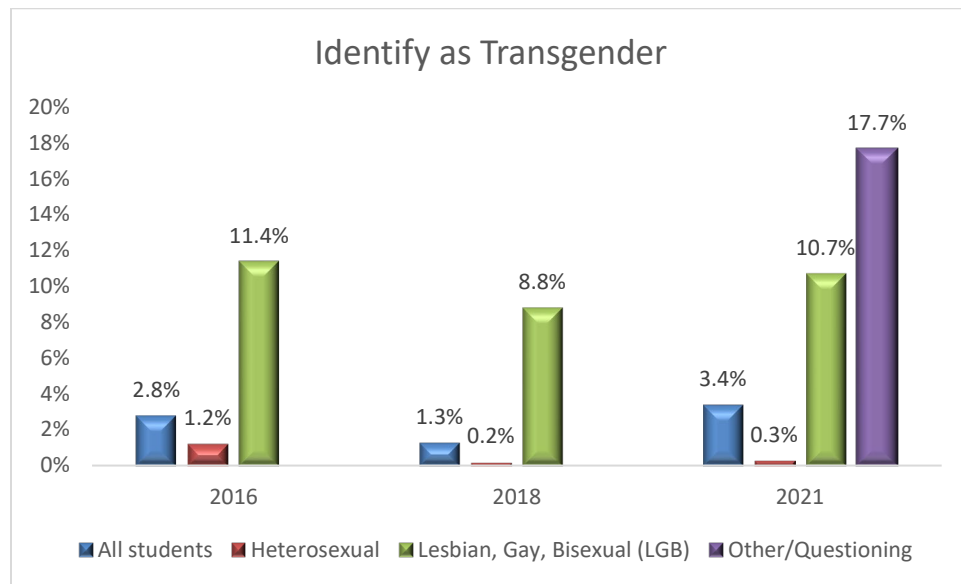


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Q65.

Transgender Identity

Transgender identity is also increasing over time.

- In 2021, **25% more** students (of any sexual identity) identified as **transgender** than in **2016**.
- While transgender identity prevalence was **10.7%** in the **LGB** population, the added category of **Other/Questioning** showed the **highest prevalence** of transgender identity (**17.7%**).

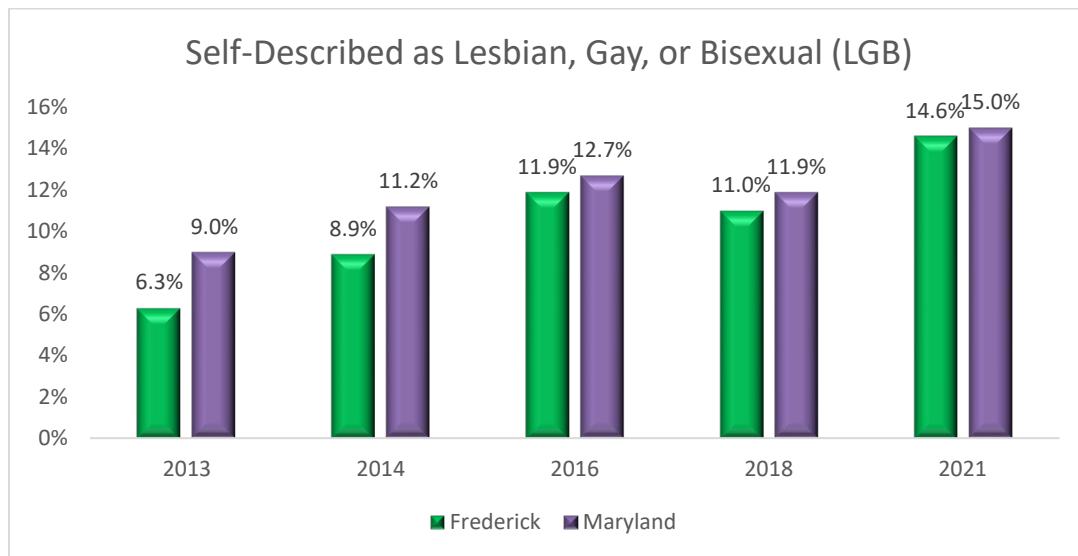


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN88.

Frederick County vs. Maryland

In comparison to the state of Maryland:

- Student self-describing as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual (LGB) has more than **doubled in Frederick County** in the past 8 years, growing from 6.3% in 2013 to 14.6% in 2021.
- The state of **Maryland shows a 50% increase** in LGB identification in the same time period (9.0% in 2013 to 15.0% in 2021).
- Prevalence of LGB identity in Frederick County is now close to on par with the state of Maryland, though still slightly lower.

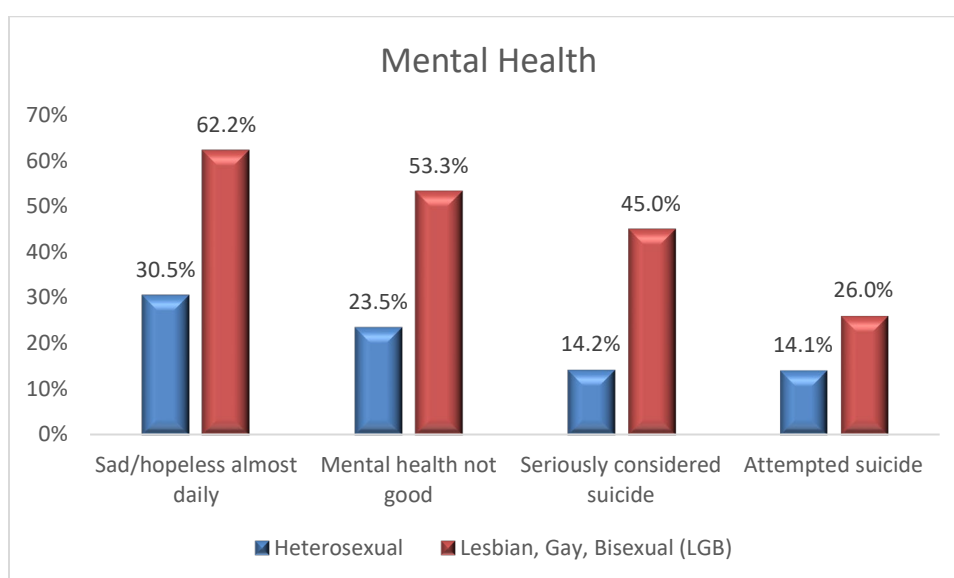


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Q65.

Mental Health

While mental health is of concern across all students, LGB students experience mental health issues at much higher rates than Heterosexual students. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Over **twice** as likely to report that their mental health was most of the time or always not good (including stress, anxiety, and depression, during the past 30 days).
- Over **three** times as likely to report they seriously considered attempting suicide (during the past 12 months).
- Nearly **twice** as likely to report actually attempting suicide (during the past 12 months).
- Over **twice** as likely to report feeling sad or hopeless (almost every day for ≥ 2 weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities, ever during the past 12 months).

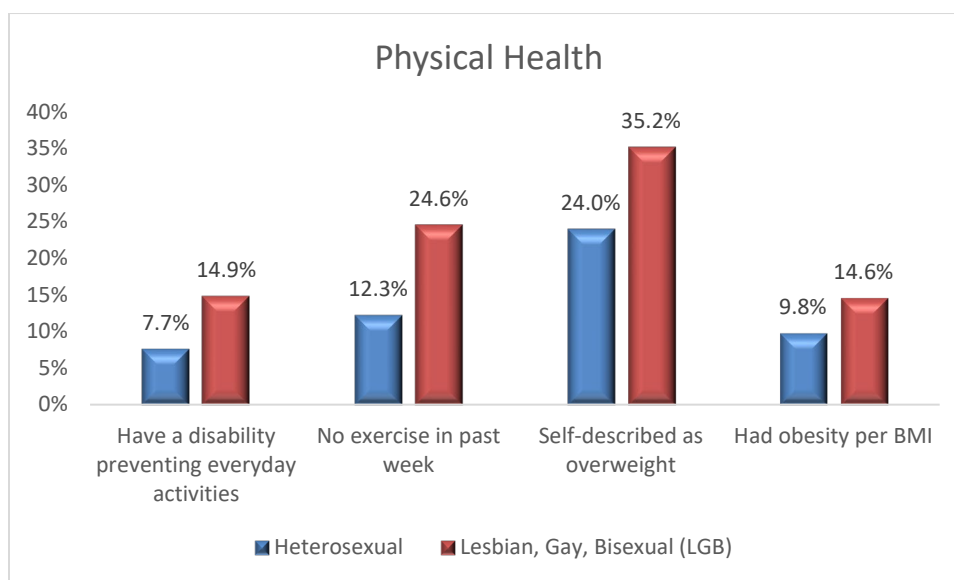


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN85, QN26, QN28, QN25.

Physical Health

LGB students are less physically healthy. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Nearly **twice** as likely to have a disability or long-term health problem that keeps them from doing everyday activities (such as bathing, getting dressed, doing schoolwork, playing sports, or being with friends).
- **Twice** as likely NOT to participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity on at least 1 day (in any kind of physical activity that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time during the 7 days before the survey).
- Nearly **50%** more likely to describe themselves as slightly or very overweight.
- Nearly **50%** more likely to have obesity (\geq 95th percentile for body mass index, based on sex- and age-specific reference data from the 2000 CDC growth charts).

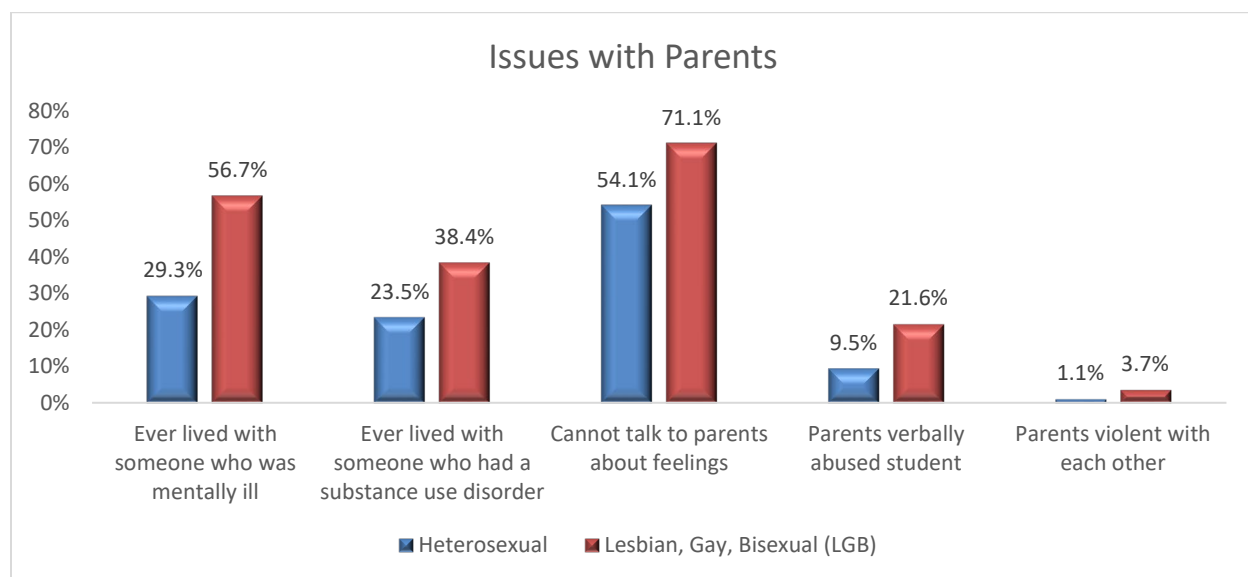


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN107, QNPA0DAY, QN66, QNOBESE.

Issues with Parents

Additionally, LGB students have more challenges with parents and other adult figures. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Nearly **twice** as likely to have ever lived with someone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal.
- **50%** more likely to have ever lived with someone who was having a problem with alcohol or drug use.
- Nearly **50%** more likely to sometimes, rarely, or never feel that they are able to talk to an adult in their family or another caring adult about their feelings (during their life).
- Over **twice** as likely to report that a parent or other adult in their home most of the time or always swore at them, insulted them, or put them down (during their life).
- Over **three** times as likely to have parents or other adults in their home most of the time or always slapped, hit, kicked, punched, or beat each other up (during their life).

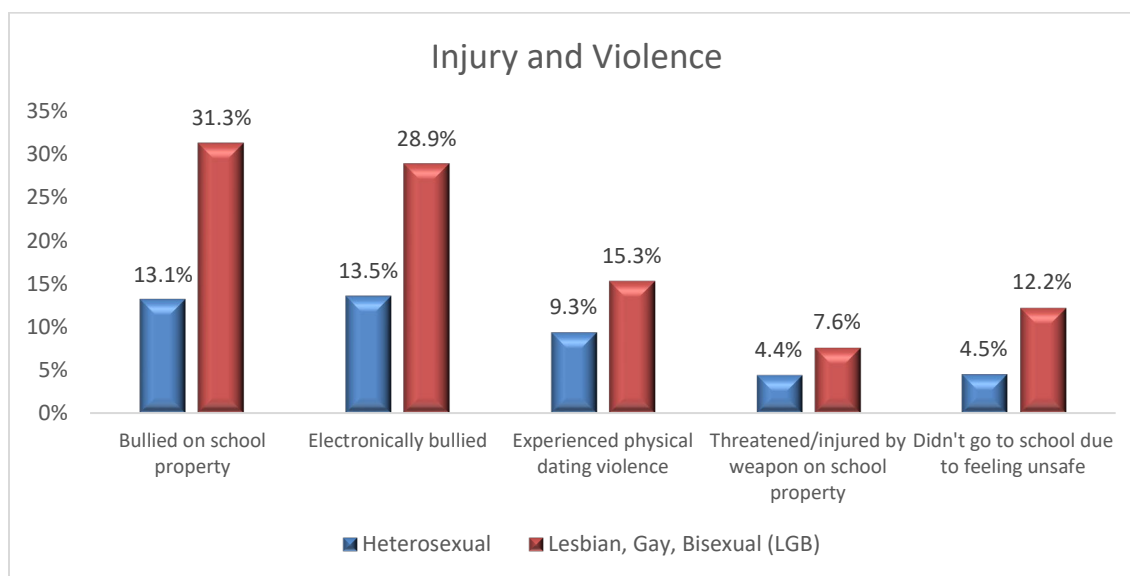


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN112, QN111, QN119, QN109, QN114

Injury and Violence

LGB students have experienced more bullying and violence. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Nearly **three times** as likely to have been bullied on school property (ever during the 12 months before the survey).
- Over **twice as likely** to have been electronically bullied (counting being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media, ever during the 12 months before the survey).
- Over **50% more likely** to have experienced physical dating violence (being physically hurt on purpose by someone they were dating or going out with [counting such things as being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon] one or more times during the 12 months before the survey, among students who dated or went out with someone during the 12 months before the survey).
- Over **50% more likely** to have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (such as a gun, knife, or club, one or more times during the 12 months before the survey).
- More than **twice as likely** not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).

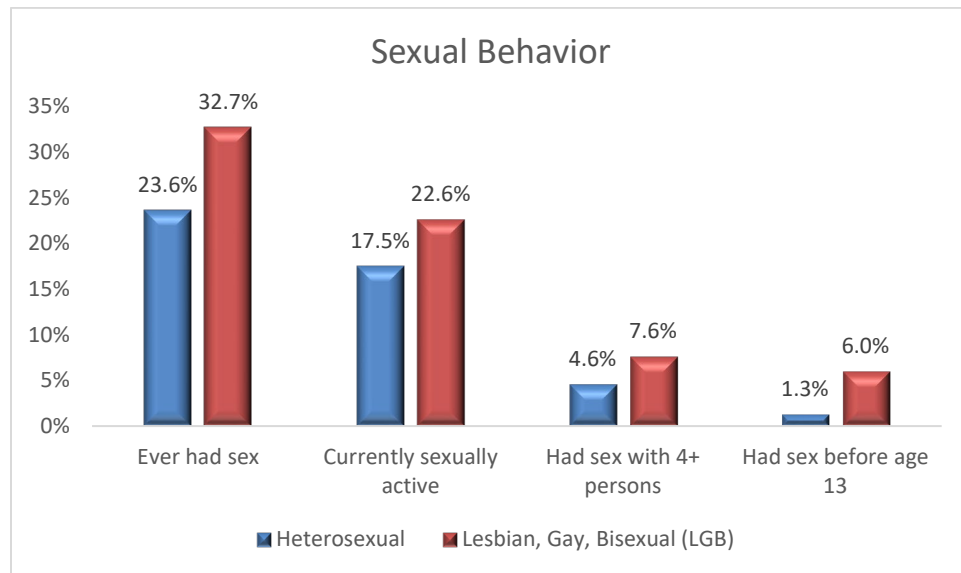


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN23, QN24, QN22, QN15, QN14

Sexual Behaviors

LGB students have higher rates of sexual behavior. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Over **33% more likely** to ever have had sexual intercourse.
- Nearly **33% more likely** to be currently sexually active (had sexual intercourse with at least one person, during the 3 months before the survey).
- Over **50% more likely** to have had intercourse with four or more persons during their life.
- Nearly **five times as likely** to have had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years.

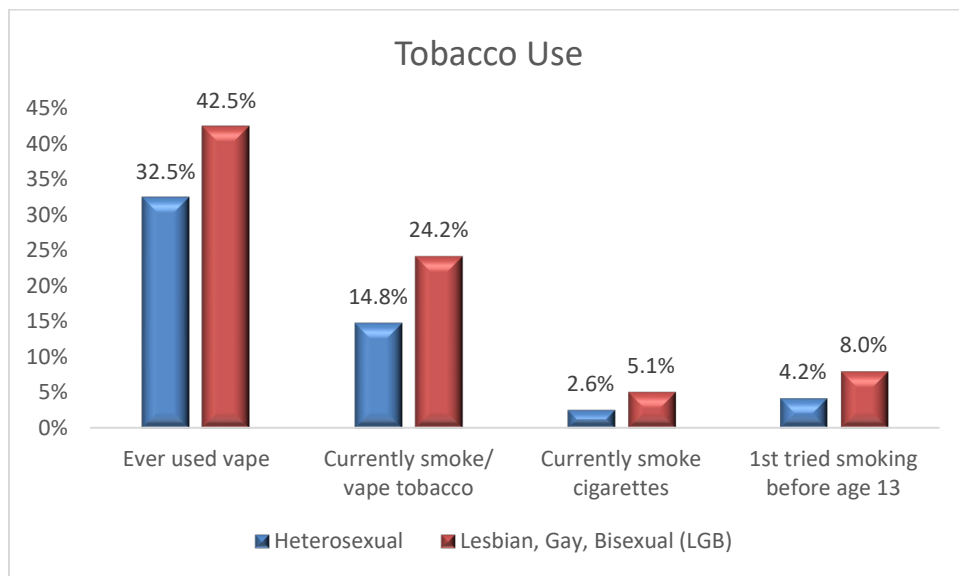


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN57, QN60, QN59, QN58

Tobacco Use

LGB students have higher rates of tobacco use. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Nearly **33% more likely** to have ever used an electronic vapor product (including e-cigarettes, vapes, vape pens, e-cigars, e-hookahs, hookah pens, and mods [such as JUUL, SMOK, Suorin, Vuse, and blu]).
- Over **50% more likely** to currently use an electronic vapor product (including e-cigarettes, vapes, vape pens, e-cigars, e-hookahs, hookah pens, and mods [such as JUUL, SMOK, Suorin, Vuse, and blu], on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- Nearly **twice as likely** to currently smoke cigarettes (on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- Nearly **twice as likely** to have first tried cigarette smoking before age 13 years (even one or two puffs).

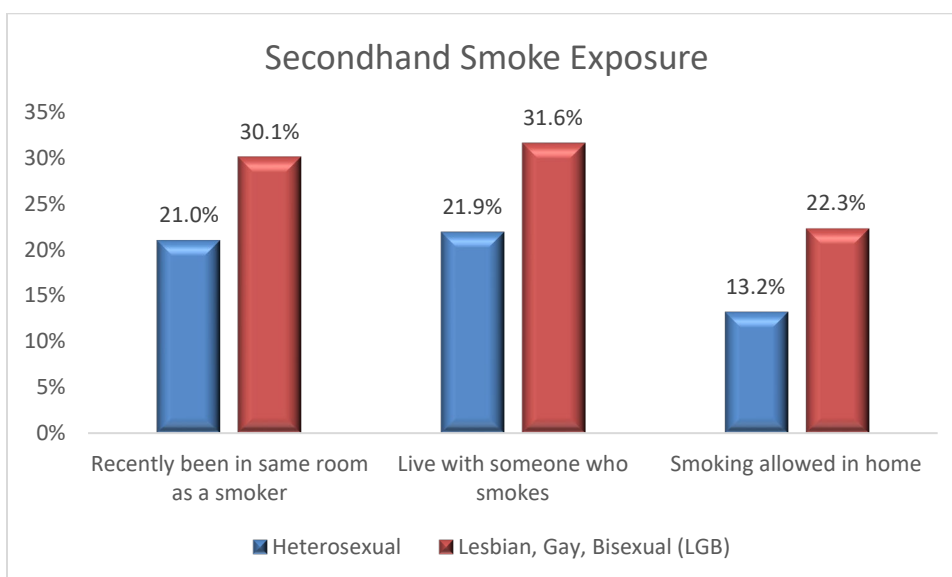


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN34, QNTB5, QN32, QN31.

Secondhand Smoke Exposure

LGB students also have more exposure to secondhand smoke. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- **50% more likely** to have been in the same room with someone who was smoking (on at least one day during the 7 days before the survey).
- **50% more likely** to live with someone who now smokes cigarettes or cigars.
- Nearly **50% more likely** to report that the rule about smoking inside their home is that there are no rules about smoking, that smoking is allowed in some places or at sometimes, or that smoking is allowed anywhere, inside their home (not counting decks, garages, or porches).

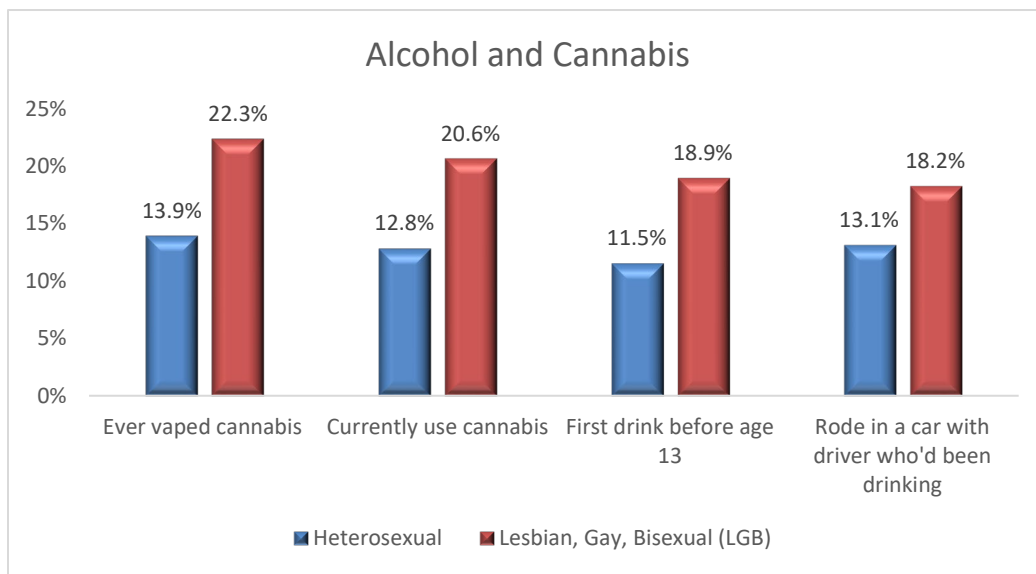


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN102, QN100, QN101

Alcohol and Cannabis Use

LGB students are more likely to use cannabis and start drinking alcohol at a young age. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Over **50%** more likely to have ever used an electronic vapor product to smoke marijuana, THC or hash oil, or THC wax.
- Nearly **50%** more likely to currently use marijuana (one or more times during the 30 days before the survey).
- Over **50%** more likely to have had their first drink of alcohol before age 13 years (other than a few sips)
- Nearly **50%** more likely to have ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol (in a car or other vehicle, one or more times during the 30 days before the survey).

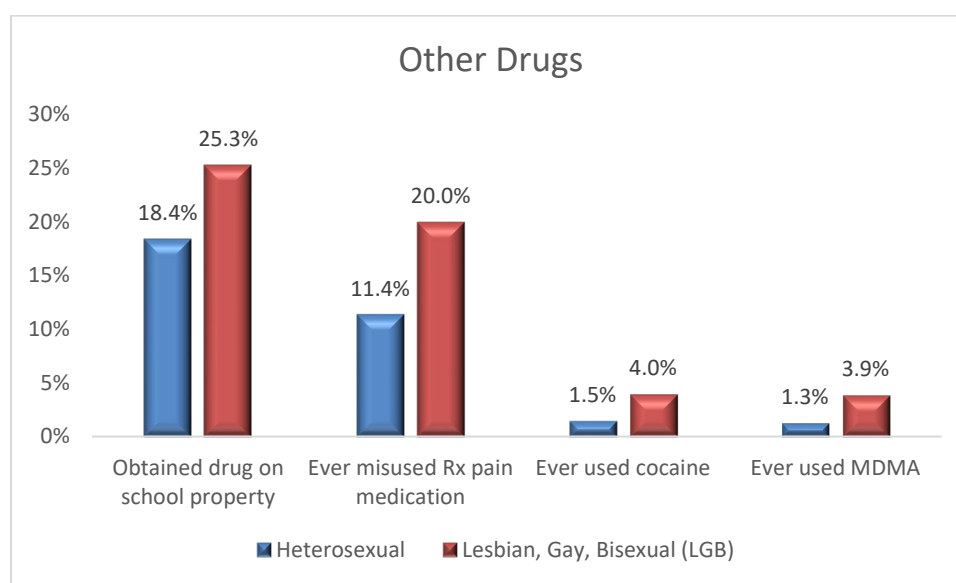


2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN95, QN47, QN40, QN9

Other Drug Use

LGB students are more likely to use several other drugs as well. Compared to Heterosexual students, LGB students were:

- Over **25% more likely** to have been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property (during the 12 months before the survey).
- Nearly **twice as likely** to have ever taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it (counting drugs such as codeine, Vicodin, OxyContin, Hydrocodone, and Percocet, one or more times during their life).
- Nearly **three times as likely** to have ever used cocaine (any form of cocaine, including powder, crack, or freebase, one or more times during their life).
- **Three times as likely** to have ever used ecstasy (also called "MDMA" or "Molly," one or more times during their life).



2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, QN56, QN49, QN50, QN54.

Conclusions

LGB students continue to have more personal challenges and risk behaviors compared to their Heterosexual counterparts. LGB students may benefit from additional support in the areas of mental health, physical health, parental ties, violence, sexual health, and substance abuse, as those are the areas with the biggest gaps between groups. These conclusions also apply to Questioning and Other sexual identities, as well as Transgender students.