

# Sexual Orientation and Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students in 2007



RI Departments of Health and Elementary & Secondary Education  
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## Introduction

This report presents data on rates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure (LGBU) students for seven demographic subgroups and rates for thirty health indicators for public high school students. Data are from Rhode Island's 2007 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

**About the YRBS:** The YRBS is an anonymous and voluntary survey among random samples of high school students in over 60 states and localities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the YRBS to monitor risk behaviors related to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.

**Rhode Island's YRBS:** In the spring of 2007, 2,210 Rhode Island adolescents participated in the YRBS with a 66% response rate. These weighted, **self-reported findings** are representative of 9th to 12th grade public high school students statewide and can be used to make important inferences concerning health-risk behaviors.

**LGBU Definition:** Students were defined as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure if they answered B, C, or D to the following question: Which of the following best describes you? (A. Heterosexual; B. Gay or Lesbian; C. Bisexual; D. Not Sure).

**Reading statistics:** This report presents bar graphs showing percentages and 95% confidence intervals (CI). As percentages from survey data are estimates, the 95% CI indicates the range of values within which the "true" value lies 95% of the time. When two groups have a 95% CI that overlap, it indicates that the "true" values are likely to be similar in both groups. If the 95% CI's do not overlap, it indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups.

**Acknowledgements:** The RI Departments of Health; Elementary and Secondary Education; Mental Health, Retardation, and Hospitals; and the Office of Health and Human Services provided funding and other support for the YRBS.

**Further information:** For the YRBS go to <http://www.health.ri.gov/chic/statistics/yrbs.php>, or contact the Center for Health Data and Analysis, RI Department of Health (401-222-7628); for LGBTQQ info go to <http://www.thriveri.org/issues/hiv.html> or contact the RI Department of Education Coordinated School Health Program – thrive (401-222-8951).

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## Highlights

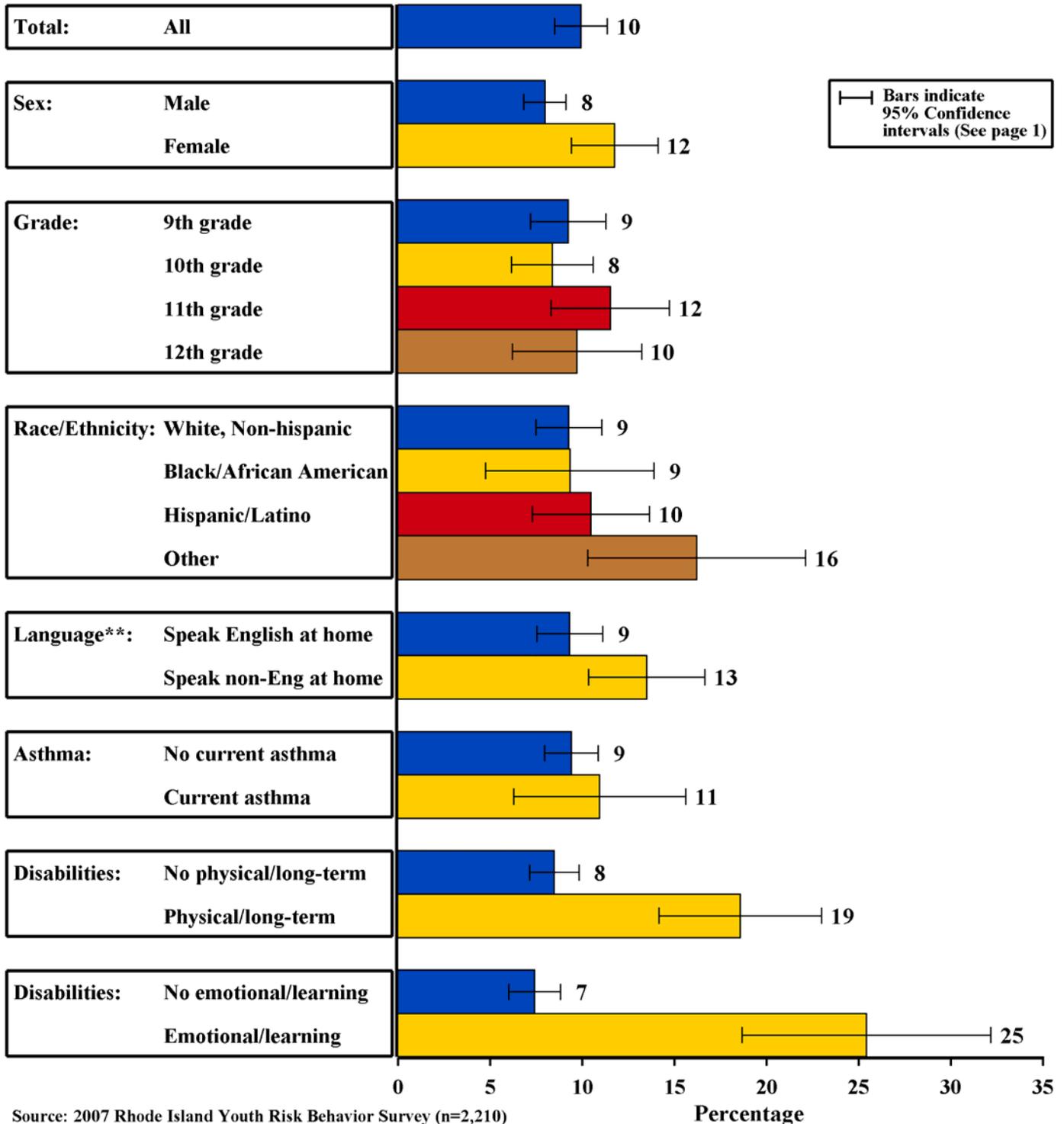
- ❖ 10% of students (representative of 5,000 statewide) identified themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Unsure (LGBU). Females and students with physical or emotional/learning disabilities were more likely to be LGBU. (Fig 1) Compared to heterosexuals, LGBU students had a greater risk for 27 of 30 behaviors listed in this report and a similar risk for the other 3 behaviors (weapon carrying, condom use, and overweight/obesity).
- ❖ LGBU students were more likely to engage in risky safety behaviors (e.g., not wearing a seatbelt, riding in a vehicle with a driver who has been drinking). They were also at increased risk for violent behaviors (e.g., being threatened or injured with a weapon at school, physical fighting, dating violence, sad and hopeless feelings). They were much more likely to skip school due to unsafe feelings, be forced to have sexual intercourse, or attempt suicide. LGBU students had a higher prevalence for ever trying cigarettes or alcohol and for being current users of cigarettes, any tobacco product, or alcohol. (Fig 2)
- ❖ LGBU students were more likely to have ever used marijuana or taken painkillers and much more likely to have ever used cocaine, inhalants, or ecstasy. More LGBU students were sexually active, initiated sex at an early age, had multiple sex partners, or had not had AIDS/HIV education. They engaged in fasting more often and were more likely to get insufficient physical activity. Emotional & learning disabilities were also much more prevalent among LGBU students. (Fig 3)

## Implications

2007 YRBS data provide an opportunity to identify the impacts of sexual orientation on youth behavior and outcomes. Although all students participate in some risky behaviors, the data indicate that students who identify as LGBU engage in these behaviors more consistently and to a more unhealthy level. LGBU youth need targeted school and community programs to support and promote more positive outcomes, such as:

- ❖ Programs and policies that support self esteem and diversity
- ❖ Connections to LGBU knowledgeable and supportive adults
- ❖ Interventions addressing youth behavioral and mental health care needs
- ❖ Increased emphasis on creating and maintaining safe schools for LGBU youth
- ❖ Academic intervention that ensures the integration of LGBU related issues
- ❖ Professional development for teachers/administrators on LGBU issues
- ❖ Support for the development of gay/straight alliances in schools

**Figure 1**  
**LGB/Unsure\* Among RI Public High Schools**  
**(Grades 9-12 students) within demographic subgroups -- 2007**

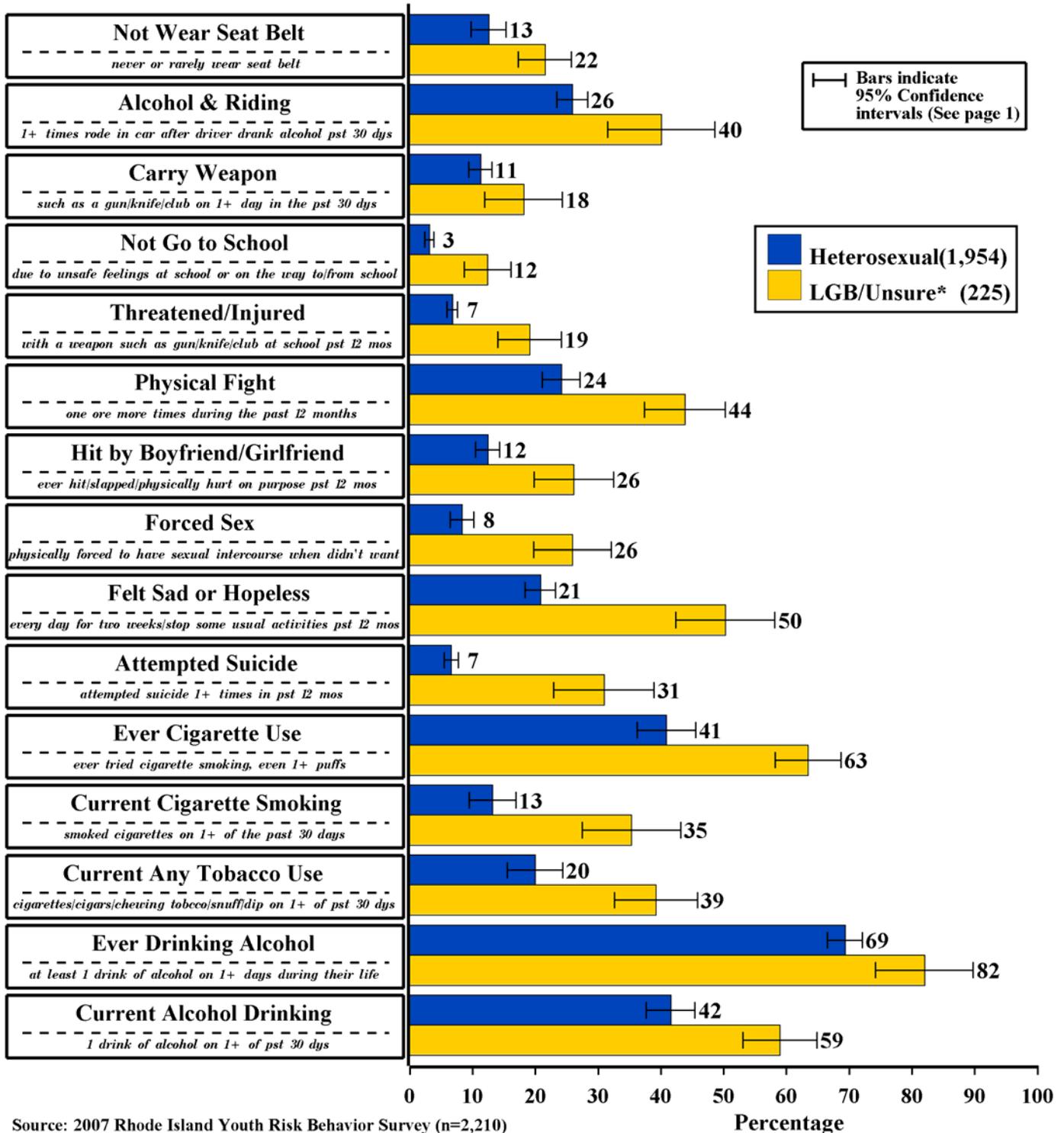


Source: 2007 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,210)

\* LGB/Unsure: Students who describe their sexual orientation as Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Unsure

\*\* Primary Language: Students usually speak at home (English/Spanish/Portuguese/Cape Verdean Creole/Other)

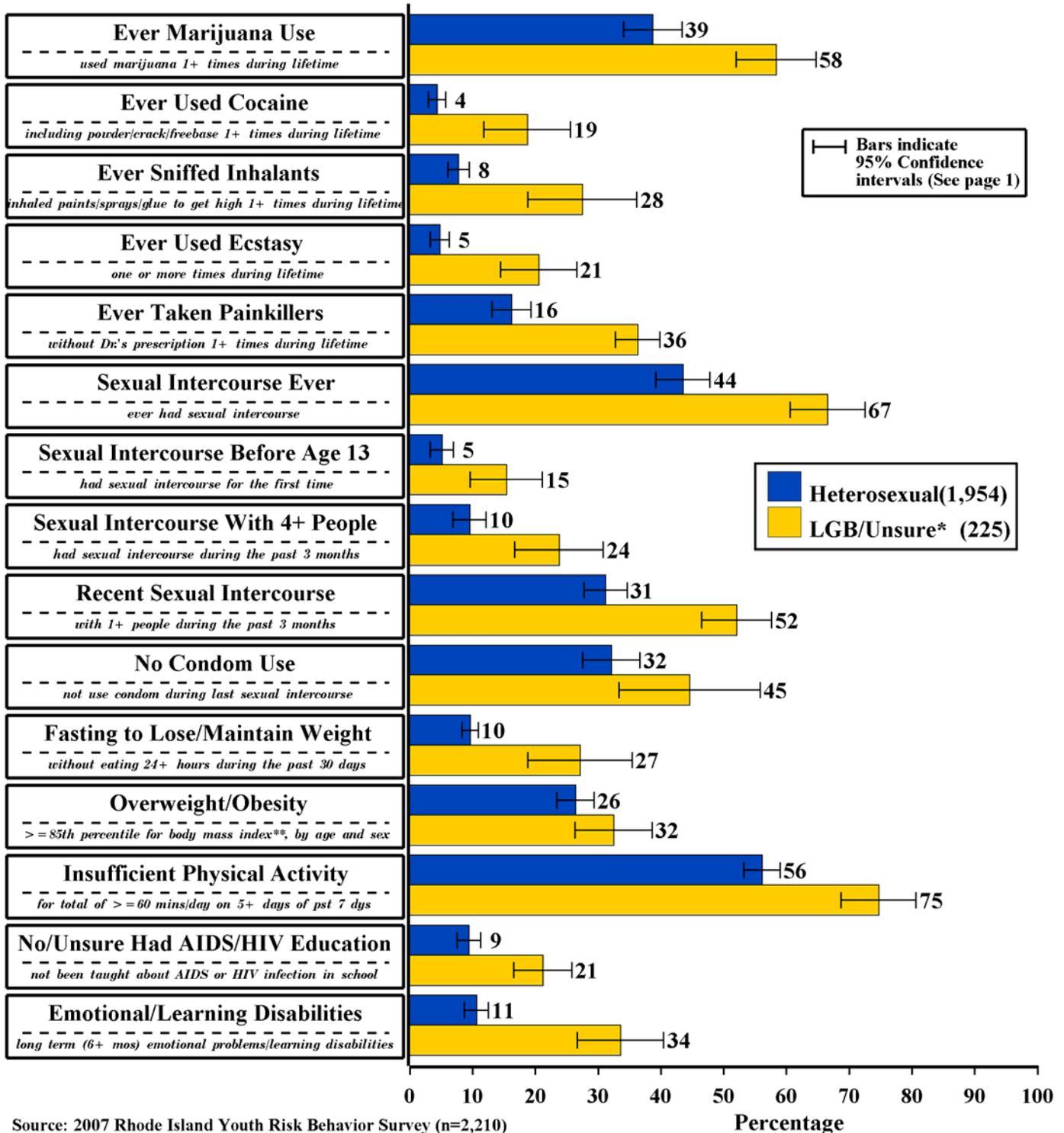
**Figure 2**  
**Risk Behaviors Among RI Public High Schools**  
**(Grades 9-12 students) by sexual orientation -- 2007**



Source: 2007 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,210)

\* LGB/Unsure: Students who describe their sexual orientation as Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Unsure

**Figure 3**  
**Risk Behaviors Among RI Public High Schools**  
**(Grades 9-12 students) by sexual orientation -- 2007**



Source: 2007 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,210)

\* LGB/Unsure: Students who describe their sexual orientation as Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Unsure

\*\* Body Mass Index = weight in kilograms / (height in meters)<sup>2</sup>