

Teen Suicidal Behavior

A Survey of Oregon High School Students, 1997

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Methodology

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) collects self-reported demographic and behavioral data from Oregon high school students; it is the counterpart to the Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, a survey of Oregonians 18 or older. (A report on adult suicide ideation was published last year.⁸) The YRBS is conducted in the spring of odd-numbered years.

*The 1997 YRBS
included almost 35,000 students, more than
any previous survey.*

Fifty high schools were randomly selected, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protocol, to participate in the 1997 YRBS. Because only 24 agreed to participate, the sample was insufficient to meet CDC random sample guidelines. Instead, results from a convenience sample consisting of 78 volunteer schools and the 24 schools that originally agreed to participate are included in this year's data. (All school superintendents for each of Oregon's 233 public schools having grades 9, 10, 11, or 12 were invited to participate in the 1997 YRBS; participating schools are listed in Appendix A.) Although some large school districts declined to participate, the geographic representation of the sample was the most widespread of any Oregon YRBS. Ultimately, about one in five high school students were surveyed; 34,933 surveys were returned.⁹

For tabulations, the survey data was weighted to more accurately represent Oregon's population of high school students. Each student's survey was assigned a weight based on the size and socioeconomic rank of his or her school.

*Throughout this report, and in their own words,
are statements made by the students;
they are reproduced as written and placed in quotes.*
Ellipses mark deleted expletives.

School participation in the YRBS required permission at both district and school levels. In addition, schools were required to notify parents of the survey and give parents the option to withdraw their child/children from participation. Finally, students themselves could decline to take the survey.

In order to verify the honesty of responses, surveys were checked visually and then by computer for consistency between questions. Three percent (1,100 surveys) were not counted because of answers to a verification question (a question to which an affirmative answer should not occur). Five percent of the surveys were removed because they had 11 or more inconsistencies (e.g., drank more alcohol in the last month than they had drunk in their life), out of range answers (e.g., answered "H" on a question with "A" to "D" responses allowed), and multiple answers where only one answer was allowed. Another 434 surveys were not usable in final tabulations because gender or grade was missing. A total of 7.3% of the surveys (2,555) were eliminated by the above methods. All inconsistent pairs, out of range answers, and multiple answers were counted as missing data on the remaining surveys. The final sample included 32,378 usable surveys, representing 20.5% of the state's 157,769 high school students.

The YRBS included a large number of Oregon students; the results will be useful in tracking trends and changes in the health risk behaviors of youth in our state, but may not be representative of those who dropped-out of school or declined to participate in the survey.

"I think this [the survey] is a great idea. I appreciate that someone is willing to spend the time to do this kind of thing. Its a concern of many and I'm glad that we have this oppurtunity."

This report describes demographic, environmental, and behavioral characteristics associated with suicide attempts, identifying those that are predictive of an increased risk of suicidal behavior among Oregon's High School youth. Few of the variables are causative (e.g., not using a seatbelt does not cause suicide), although some may be more directly related to subsequent suicidal behavior (e.g., physical abuse). Many youth have a constellation of risk factors, some of which arise in the home. However, few of the questions included in the YRBS directly pertain to the home environment.

"Who ever wrote this survey obviously based it on a "sterotypical" teenager. I resent the implication that all teenagers are on a hormonal rampage, rebeling against their parents & society, by leading a high risk life style including Sex, drugs, and rock & roll. Most teenagers will try a risky behavior at some point. I believe this is Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest, & this "rebelous" stage is only a genetic way to rid the human race of the truely stupid. Most People survive their teens, because teens do have a small ammount of common sense, and a survival instinct."