

School safety, substance use, and mental health among Pennsylvania high school students

SEOW 2020



School safety is important

- * Feelings of safety at school among high school students are associated with decreased odds of substance use, symptoms of depression, and suicidal ideation [7].
- * Recent alcohol, cigarette, marijuana, or vaping use was less prevalent among students who felt safe at school [7].
- * Symptoms of depression (including feeling depressed or sad most days in the past 12 months, feeling that life is not worth it, or feeling no good or a failure) and suicidal thoughts and actions were less prevalent among students who felt safe at school [7].

School climate matters

School climate arises from the experiences and perceptions of students, parents, and staff [1, 2]. It is also an influential aspect of education that can impact student performance, behavior, and health. Substance use, victimization, and problem behaviors are correlated with the overall school environment [3] and can strongly influence student's perceptions of school safety [4]. Students who feel unsafe in school may turn to substance use to fit in with peer groups [5] and may be more likely to report mental health problems [6].

Learn more about school climate [here](#).

* 77% of students felt safe at school [7].

* 40% of students used alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, or vaping devices in the past 30 days [7].

* 74% of students had moderate to high depressive symptoms [7].

* 1 in 5 students had ever seriously considered suicide [7].

Accounting for differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity, and experiences of bullying, students who felt safe at school* had [7]:

*compared to students who did not feel safe at school.

* 36% lower odds of using substances (alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, or vaping).

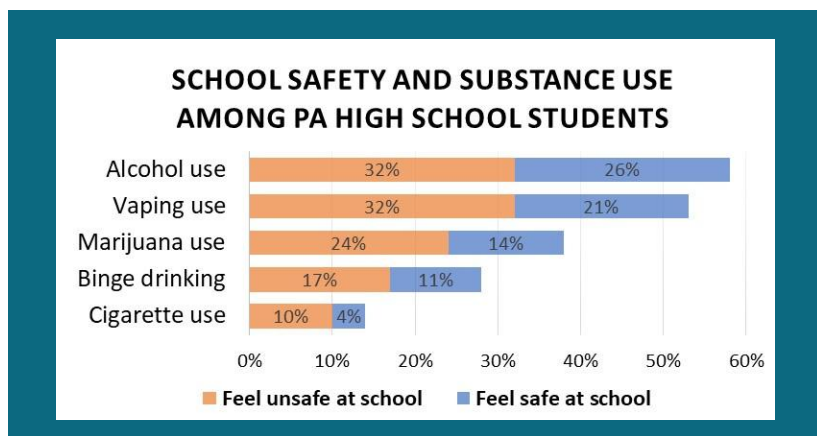
* 27% lower odds of experiencing moderate or high levels of depression.

* 56% lower odds of suicidal ideation.

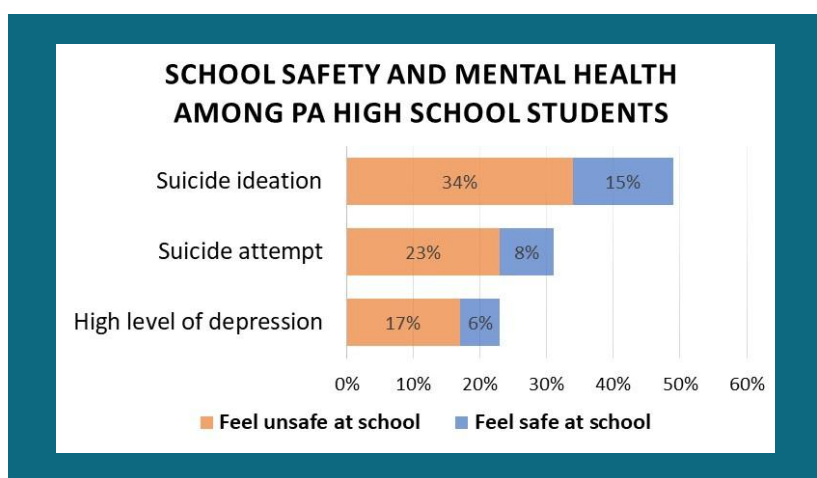
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Results



Students who reported feeling safer at school had lower levels of recent substance use, including alcohol, cigarette, vaping, and marijuana use in the past 30 days [7].



Students who reported feeling safer at school had lower levels of depression, suicidal ideation, or suicide attempts [7].

Data source

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is a biennial survey administered to middle school and high school students to monitor youth knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding substance use and other risk behaviors. Data from PAYS 2019 were used to examine the link between school safety, substance use, and mental health in high school students (10th and 12th grade).

The **State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW)** is supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. SEOW members represent both governmental and non-governmental agencies from across Pennsylvania. The goal of the SEOW is to inform and enhance state and community decisions regarding substance misuse and mental illness prevention programs, practices, and policies.

References

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