

Reduce Disparities in Youth Risk and Protective Factors

Priority 5 – Reduce the disparity in health risk factors and protective factors between students.

THE PROBLEM

Risk factors are characteristics that increase the likelihood of poor health outcomes, whereas protective factors are characteristics that decrease the likelihood of poor health outcomes. By intervening to decrease risk factors and improve protective factors, poor health outcomes can be prevented. In Kent County, risk and protective factors are not equally distributed among student sub-populations. The MiPHY surveys students in the 7th, 9th, and 11th grade from schools across the State of Michigan that are willing to participate. Kent County's results for 2009/2010 school year highlight disparities in several areas:

- Tobacco & marijuana use is more common among boys;
- Prescription drug & alcohol use is more common among girls;
- Tobacco use is most common among white and American Indian students;
- Drug & alcohol use is more common among African American & Hispanic students;
- Having had sex is more common among African American and Hispanic/Latino students;
- Not wearing a seatbelt is more common among African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian Students; and
- Not wearing a bike helmet is more common among male, African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian Students.

Disparities also exist among youth in Kent County related to perceptions of risk associated with substance abuse. Although 72.0% of students completing the MiPHY (2010) believed that regular alcohol use was a moderate or great risk, students receiving Ds/Fs, African American, and American Indian students were less likely to report alcohol use to be a moderate or great risk. Similarly, while 67.3% of students in the County reported regular marijuana use to be a moderate or great risk, male students, African American students, Hispanic students, and students receiving Ds/Fs were less likely to perceive regular marijuana use as risky.

With regard to tobacco use, 84.5% of students reported regular cigarette use to be a moderate or great risk; however, fewer African American and Asian American students perceived cigarette smoking to be risky. As with all three of these items, students receiving Ds/Fs were least likely to perceive cigarette smoking as risky.

HP2020: Increase the proportion of adolescents perceiving great risk associated with alcohol abuse from 40.5% to 44.6%.

HP2020: Increase the proportion of adolescents perceiving great risk associated with smoking marijuana from 33.9% to 37.3%.

Community involvement and parental support can be important protective factors among youth. Kent County's 2009/2010 MiPHY results indicate that 88.8% of youth believed they have the opportunity to participate on sports teams, 61.5% reported scouting opportunities are available, 62.2% reported boys and girls clubs are available, 47.5% reported 4-H clubs are available, and 63.3% reported service clubs are available. However, students receiving Ds/

HP2020: Increase the proportion of adolescents who participate in extracurricular and out-of-school activities from 82.5% to 90.8%.

Fs were less likely to report that they have positive opportunities to become involved in their community as compared with those receiving As/Bs. Hispanic and African American youth were also less likely to report opportunities for community involvement are available as compared with youth of other racial and ethnic backgrounds in the county.

Additionally, 47.1% of youth in Kent County indicated they know adults in their neighborhood they could talk about something important with, and 73.6% indicated they could ask their mom or dad for help with personal problems. However, African American, Hispanic, and Asian students were less likely to report that they know adults who they can talk to about something important or that they can go to their parents for help with personal problems, as were students with Ds/Fs.

HP2020: Increase the proportion of adolescents who have an adult in their lives with whom they can talk about serious problems from 75.7% to 83.3%.

By far, the most substantial disparities between groups of students was between students who receive Ds/Fs and students who receive As/Bs. Students receiving Ds/Fs were, on average, twice as likely as their peers to engage in health risk behaviors, and they were more likely to have felt hopeless, expressed suicidal ideation, or attempted suicide. See Figures 2 and 3.

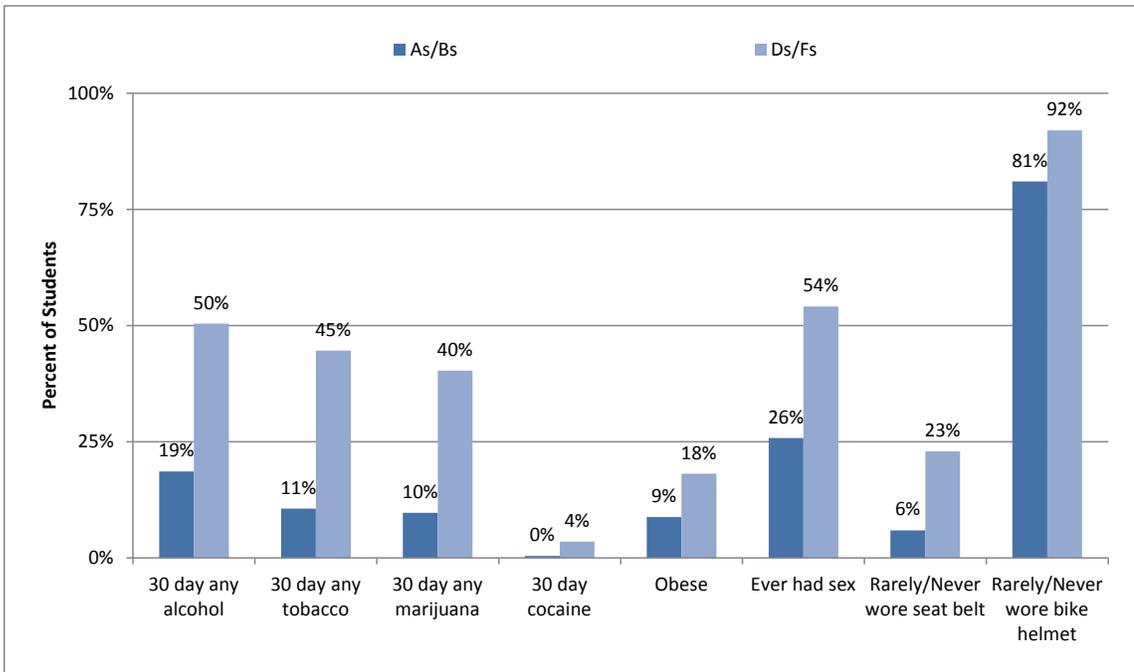


Figure 2. Disparities in risk factors between students receiving As/Bs and students receiving Ds/Fs.

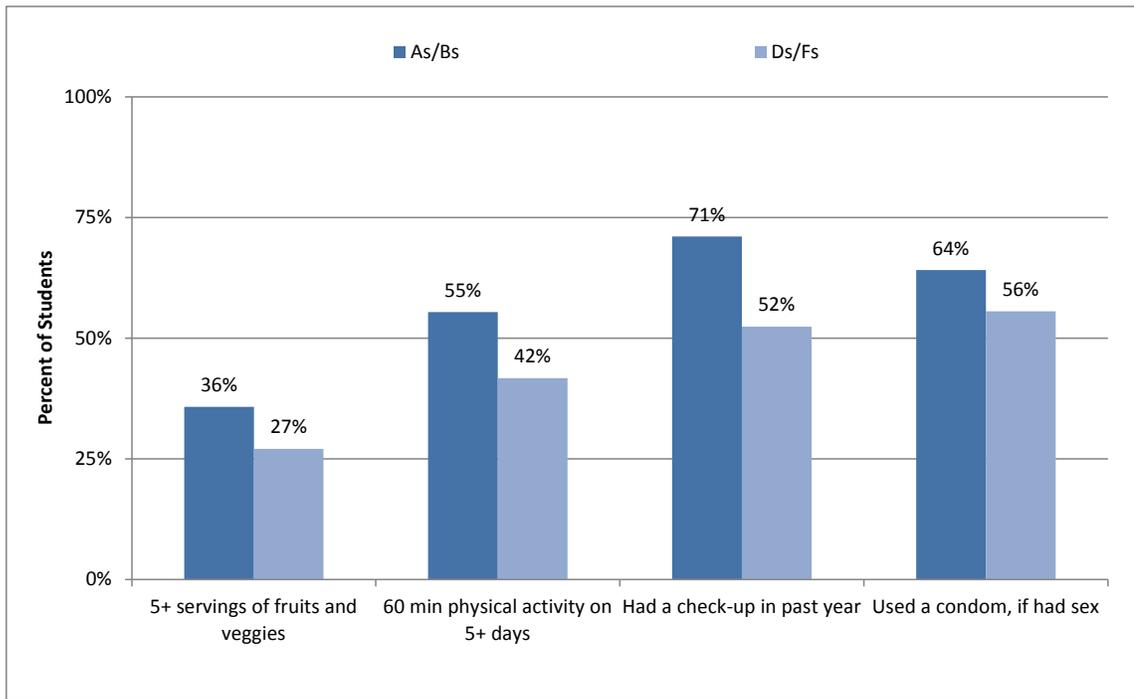


Figure 3. Disparities in protective factors between students receiving As/Bs and students receiving Ds/Fs.

When youth were asked in focus groups to talk about what prevents and promotes health for their age group, participants highlighted the differences in what youth are exposed to in different schools or parts of the community. They discussed differences in the quality of education provided in different districts, as well as the differences in opportunities at different schools. For instance, they talked about how some schools feel unsafe, whereas others seem very safe. These differences translated to how they felt about themselves and their peers.