

Association between School Connectedness and Youth Risk Behaviors in US High School Students

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BACKGROUND

- School connectedness is the sense of belonging, support, and engagement within the school environment
 - Consistently linked to various positive outcomes for adolescents (Bozzini et al., 2020)
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, school connectedness may be negatively affected due to the shift to remote teaching instructions
- Youth risk behaviors, including substance use, exposure to violence, and mental health issues, pose significant challenges to adolescents' physical, emotional, and social health (Zeinalipour, 2022)
- There remains a gap in understanding the specific relationship, if any, between school connectedness and youth risk behaviors

OBJECTIVES

- Examine associations between school connectedness and youth risk behaviors in US high school students
- Assess the impact of some sociodemographic factors on school connectedness and youth risk behaviors

METHODS

- Cross-sectional study design utilizing secondary data from CDC's 2021 National Youth Risk Behaviors survey (CDC, 2020)
 - Survey questionnaire of 99 questions administered anonymously among US high school students in 45 of 50 states
 - 17,232 usable questionnaires from 52 schools
- School connectedness measured by individuals' responses to a question on the survey regarding if they felt close to people at school or not
- YRBs (poor mental health, experiencing bullying, alcohol consumption, and use of certain illicit drugs) assessed by individuals' responses to questions regarding whether they experienced these behaviors.
- Pivot tables created to analyze associations between school connectedness and various risk behaviors with alpha level of .05
- Wald Chi-Square statistics were computed to assess the strength and significance of these associations

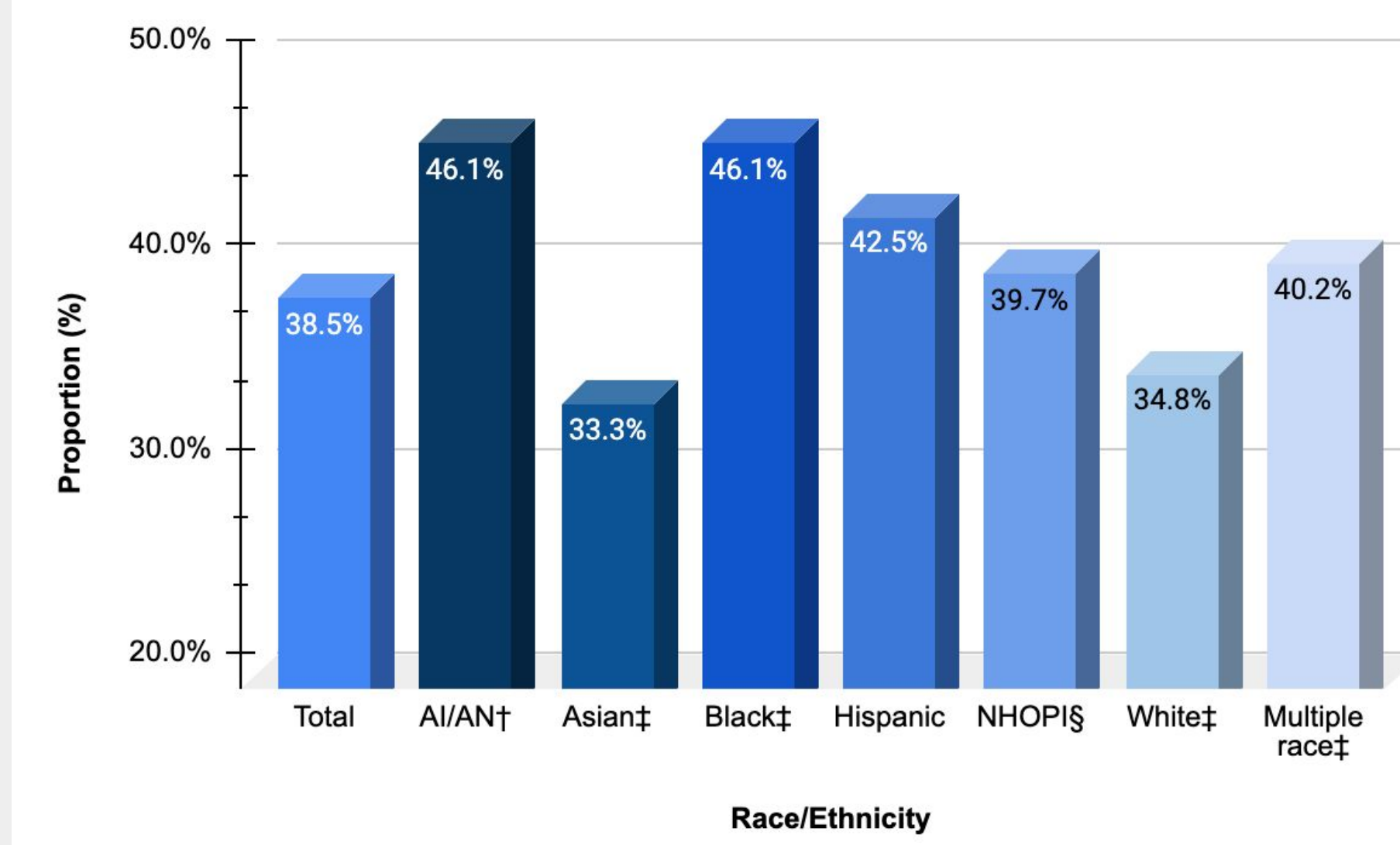
RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 17,232)

Race/ Ethnicity ^a	n (%)
White	9,151 (53.1%)
Asian Hispanic/Latino	3,244 (18.8%)
Black or African American	2,322 (13.5%)
Multiple - Non-Hispanic	1,000 (5.8%)
Asian	850 (4.9%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	145 (0.8%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	88 (0.5%)
Grade ^a	
9th	4,646 (26.6%)
10th	4,466 (25.4%)
11th	4,118 (24.3%)
12th	3,843 (23.5%)
Gender ^a	
Male	8,816 (51.7%)
Female	8,152 (48.3%)

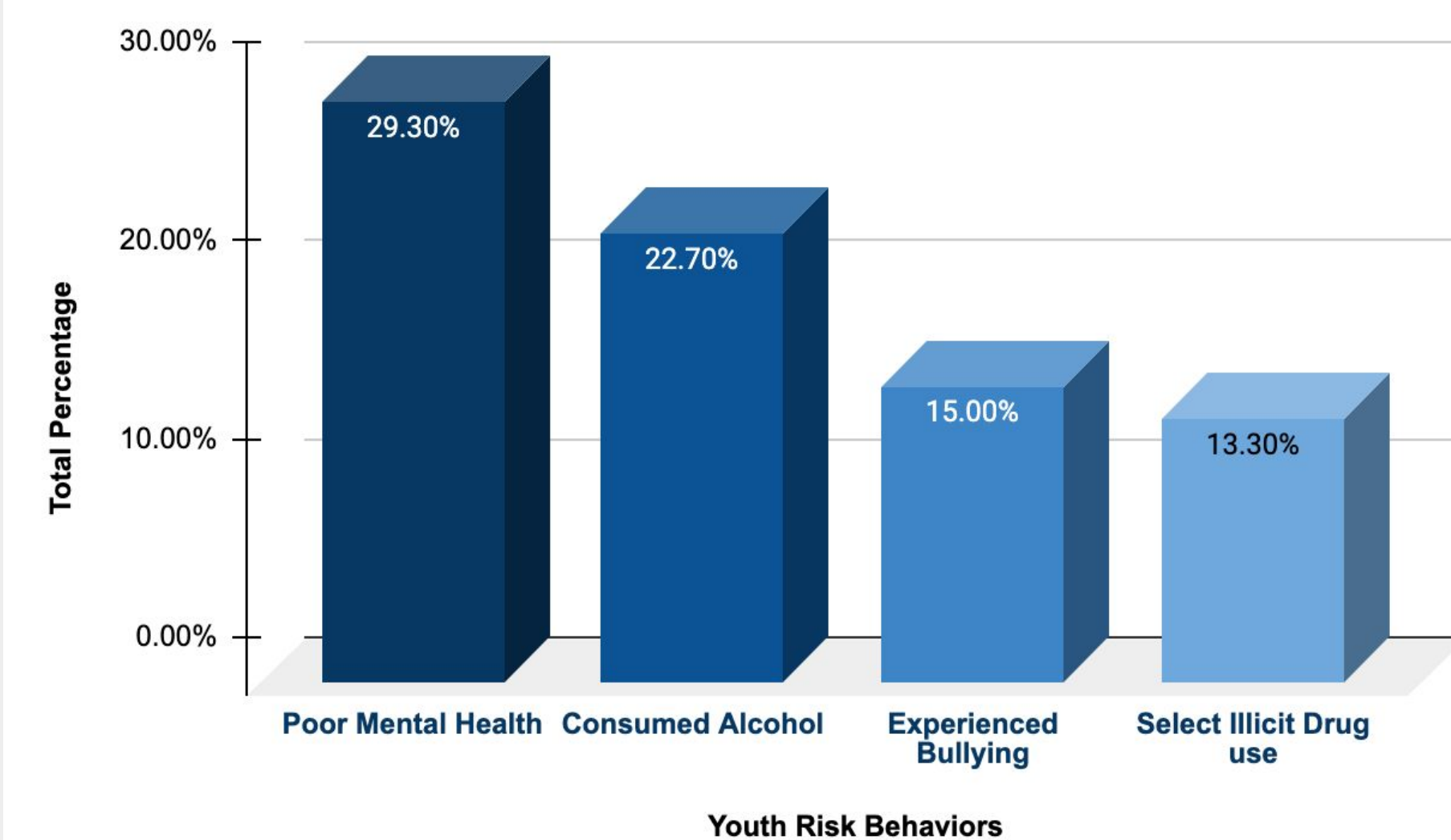
^a Values don't add up to N=17,232 (100%) due to respondents answering unsure/don't know or other

Figure 1. Sociodemographics of Reported Lack of School Connectedness, 2021



- The respondents that did not feel connected to their school were primarily American Indian or Alaska Native (46.10%) and Black or African American (46.10%)

Figure 2. Total Percentage of Each YRBs



- Most respondents reported having poor mental health and consuming alcohol as compared to the other youth risk behaviors

Table 2. Association of School Connectedness and YRB

Association of School Connectedness and YRB:	Wald Chi-Square Stat of Association	P-Value
Poor Mental Health	93.31	<0.001
Experienced Bullying	29.87	<0.001
Consumed Alcohol	3.51	0.068
Illicit Drug Use	28.24	<0.001

- Strongest association can be seen with school connectedness and poor mental health
- Association found with school connected and experiencing bullying and illicit drug use
- No association was found with school connectedness and consumption of alcohol

CONCLUSION

- There is an association with school connectedness and 3 YRBs (mental health, bullying, and drug use) among high school students in the United States underscoring the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment as a protective factor against these negative behaviors and outcomes
- No association between school connectedness and current alcohol consumption among high school students in the US could be due to differences at the individual level: some teens drink socially with friends, while others drink and isolate themselves when depressed (Cummins et al., 2019; Pedrelli et al., 2016)
- Limitations due to not all states participating, which can affect generalizability and not account for regional differences.
- Variability in responses might have led to inconsistencies, making it challenging to reach definitive results.

POLICY IMPLICATION

- Implementing targeted interventions to promote school connectedness and mitigate youth risk behaviors among high school students.
 - Peer support programs, mental health education in schools, and community engagement initiatives
 - Having student-led groups and the implementation of anti-harassment laws and procedures in schools as a way of providing a positive environment.

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REFERENCES:

