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Suicide and Health and Social Problems among Florida Students

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a school-based survey of public high school students in Florida. Current data were collected in 2021 among 4,600 students and represent some of the first indicators of health and social problems experienced by students since the COVID-19 pandemic began. As shown in Table 1, reports of

mental distress and suicide all increased since 2019. More than 39% of students reported feeling sad or hopeless during past year. In addition, more than 17% of students reported seriously considering suicide, 13.8% made a suicide plan, and nearly 9% actually attempted suicide. Of students who attempted suicide, 2.7% experienced an injury, poisoning, or overdose that required treatment by a doctor or nurse.

Table 2 shows additional health and social problems experienced by students during the prior 12 months. Approximately one third of students reported that during COVID their mental health was not good most of the time or always. This could potentially be one cause of the increases in reports of mental distress and self-harm attempts. Several measures decreased between 2019 and 2021, including being offered, sold, or given an illegal drug at school, being threatened or injured with a weapon at school, and being bullied at school. It is possible that because students spent less time physically at school during the pandemic, that this impacted students' experiences.

However, reports of being physically forced to have sex (8.0%) and sexual violence (11.1%) increased from 2019. Being bullied electronically, such as through text messages or social media was reported by nearly 13% of students and this also increased from 2019. The increases in sexual victimization and electronic bullying may have also influenced increases in mental distress and self-harm.

Table 1: Mental Distress and Suicide	2021	2019
Felt sad or hopeless in the past year	39.3%	33.7%
Seriously considered attempting suicide	17.7%	15.6%
Made a plan about how to attempt suicide	13.8%	11.8%
Actually attempted suicide	8.9%	7.9%
Suicide resulted in injury, poisoning, or overdose that required medical treatment	2.7%	2.2%

Table 2: Health and Social Problems	2021	2019
Mental health was not good during COVID, most of the time or always	33.5%	-
Offered, sold, or given an illegal drug at school	11.5%	17.6%
Threatened or injured with a weapon at school	6.2%	8.2%
Involved in a physical fight	18.9%	21.2%
Physically forced to have sexual intercourse	8.0%	7.2%
Any sexual violence/victimization	11.1%	7.0%
Bullied on school property	12.7%	14.9%
Bullied electronically (e.g., social media)	12.9%	11.3%

Sources: Florida Department of Health; https://www.floridahealth.gov/statistics-and-data/survey-data/florida-youth-survey/youth-risk-behavior-survey/_documents/2021-cdc-sum-tables.pdf

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