

Health-Risk Behaviors

and Academic Achievement

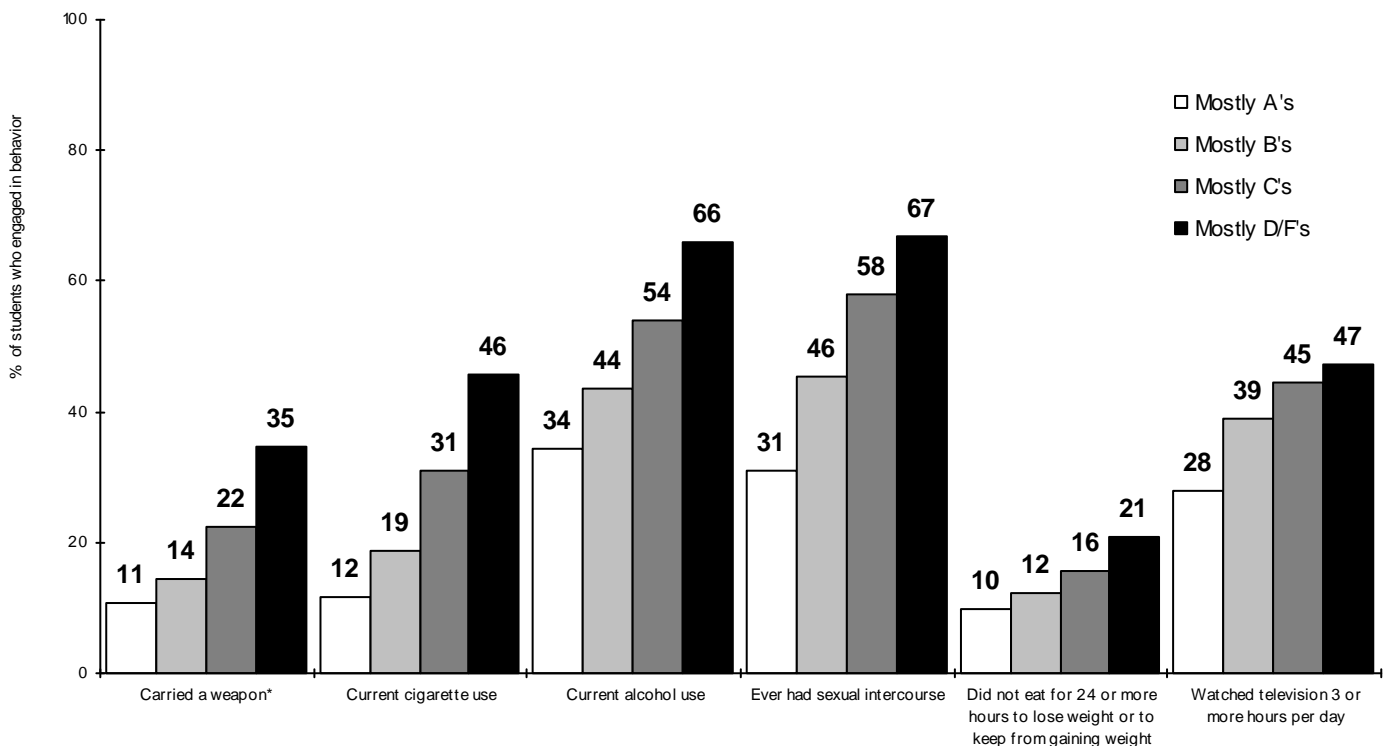
What is the relationship between health-risk behaviors and academic achievement?

Data presented below, from the 2003 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), show a negative association between health-risk behaviors and academic achievement among high school students after controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level. This means that students with higher grades are less likely to engage in health-risk behaviors than their classmates with lower grades, and students who do not engage in health-risk behaviors receive higher grades than their classmates who do engage in health-risk behaviors. These associations do not prove causation. Further research is needed to determine whether low grades lead to health-risk behaviors, health-risk behaviors lead to low grades, or some other factors lead to both of these problems.

Students with higher grades are significantly less likely to have engaged in behaviors such as:

- + **Carried a weapon** (For example, a gun, knife, or club on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- + **Current cigarette use** (Smoked cigarettes on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- + **Current alcohol use** (Had at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- + **Ever had sexual intercourse.**
- + **Did not eat for 24 or more hours to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight** (During the 30 days before the survey).
- + **Watched television 3 or more hours per day** (On an average school day).

Figure 1. Percentage of U.S. high school students who carried a weapon, currently smoked cigarettes, currently drank alcohol, ever had sexual intercourse, did not eat for 24 or more hours to lose weight or keep from gaining weight, and watched television 3 or more hours per day, by types of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D/F's) – National YRBS, 2003.



*This means that 11% of students with mostly A's carried a weapon and 35% of students with mostly D's or F's carried a weapon.

The national YRBS monitors priority health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the U.S. It is conducted every two years during the spring and provides data representative of 9th through 12th grade students in public and private schools throughout the U.S. In 2003, students completing the YRBS were asked, "During the past 12 months, how would you describe your grades in school?" and given 7 response options (Mostly A's, Mostly B's, Mostly C's, Mostly D's, Mostly F's, None of these grades, Not sure). In 2003, 27% of students received mostly A's, 38% received mostly B's, 23% received mostly C's, 6% received mostly D's or F's, and 5% reported receiving none of these grades or not sure.

Percentage of U.S. high school students who engaged in health-risk behaviors, by type of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D/F's) – National YRBS, 2003.

Health-Risk Behaviors	Percentage of U.S. high school students who engaged in each risk behavior, by type of grades mostly earned			
	A's	B's	C's	D/F's
Unintentional Injury and Violence-Related Behaviors				
Rarely or never wore a seatbelt (When riding in a car driven by someone else) ¹	11	14	24	40
Rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol (In a car or other vehicle one or more times during the 30 days before the survey) ¹	22	29	37	43
Carried a weapon (For example, a gun, knife, or club on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey) ¹	11	14	22	35
In a physical fight (One or more times during the 12 months before the survey) ¹	20	30	43	57
Ever physically forced to have sexual intercourse (When they did not want to) ²	6	8	11	16
Did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (On at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey) ¹	3	5	7	11
Attempted suicide (One or more times during the 12 months before the survey) ¹	4	7	12	19
Tobacco Use				
Current cigarette use (Smoked cigarettes on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey) ¹	12	19	31	46
Lifetime daily cigarette use (Ever smoked at least one cigarette every day for 30 days) ¹	8	12	23	33
Current tobacco use (Current cigarette use, current smokeless tobacco use, or current cigar use) ¹	16	25	38	52
Smoked cigarettes on school property (On at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey) ¹	3	5	12	22
Alcohol and Other Drug Use				
Lifetime alcohol use (Had at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during their life) ¹	65	76	82	87
Current alcohol use (Had at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey) ¹	34	44	54	66
Episodic heavy drinking (Had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row within a couple of hours on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey) ¹	19	27	35	48
Lifetime marijuana use (Used marijuana one or more times during their life) ¹	25	38	53	68
Lifetime illegal steroid use (Took steroid pills or shots without a doctor's prescription one or more times during their life) ¹	3	5	8	15
Lifetime ecstasy use (Used ecstasy [also called MDMA] one or more times during their life) ¹	7	9	14	24
Offered, sold, or given an illegal drug by someone on school property (During the 12 months before the survey) ¹	20	28	34	49
Sexual Risk Behaviors				
Ever had sexual intercourse ¹	31	46	58	67
Had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years ¹	3	6	11	16
Had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life ¹	8	13	19	28
Drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse ^{3,4}	20	22	28	34
Physical Inactivity				
Insufficient vigorous physical activity (Did not participate in physical activities that made them sweat and breathe hard ⁵ for 20 or more minutes on three or more of the 7 days preceding the survey) ¹	33	36	40	45
Watched television 3 or more hours per day (On an average school day) ¹	28	39	45	47
Unhealthy Weight Control Behaviors				
Took diet pills, powders, or liquids to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight (During the 30 days before the survey) ²	7	9	11	15

¹p<.0001 based on logistic regression analysis controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

²p<.001 based on logistic regression analysis controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

³p<.01 based on logistic regression analysis controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

⁴Among students who were currently sexually active.

⁵e.g., basketball, soccer, running, swimming laps, fast bicycling, fast dancing, or similar aerobic activity.

For more information visit http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics/ or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).



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