

**be heard.**

**Youth Health and Wellness:**  
Core Issues and Views on Existing Resources  
2008

The following report discusses the findings of a survey conducted by YouthNoise, ISIS and Ypulse. This survey was designed to assess what youth (ages 13-24) consider important mental health/wellness issues and how they obtain information and support related to these topics.

Topics include:

- Youth internet use and access

- Social networking: sites used and in what capacity

- Views on mental health/wellness issues

- How youth obtain information about mental health/wellness issues

- Views on existing online mental health/wellness resources

## Executive Summary

A 26-question online survey was administered to assess the views of youth aged 13-24 on mental health and wellness issues, and how they use the internet to obtain information and support related to these issues. Most respondents access the internet from home, spend over 15 hours a week online and have two or more social networking profiles. *MySpace* and *Facebook* were the most frequently used social networking sites. The majority of respondents know most of the people in their online social networks through school or other offline activities. Twenty percent (20%) of the respondents use online social networks to interact with people they have met both on and offline, seven percent (7%) have online social networks consisting only of people met online.

STDs were ranked the most important mental health/wellness issue, followed by drugs, unplanned pregnancy, unhealthy relationships, depression, alcohol, eating disorders and cyberbullying. This was fairly consistent across age groups, gender and ethnicity.

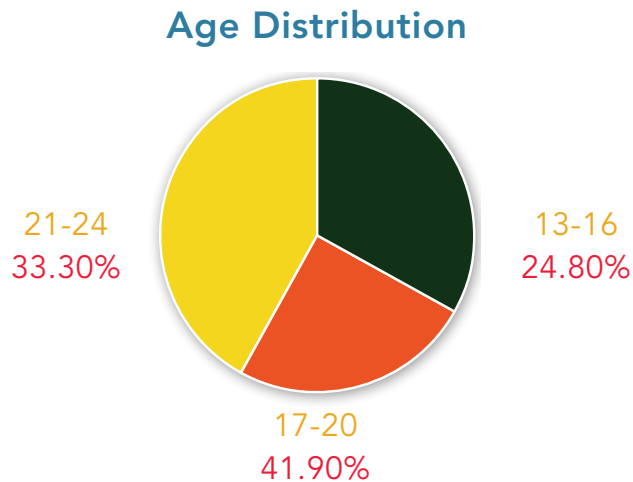
Over half the respondents stated they are accessing health and wellness information on the internet. Ten percent (10%) of the respondents have used a hotline to obtain information or support regarding mental health issues. Seventeen percent (17%) of the respondents have visited a confession oriented site or message board and posted something personal. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of these respondents stated this was a positive experience that provided relief and support.

Responses suggest sites are most helpful when they include both accurate, accessible information and a community where users can interact and obtain personal support from both peers and professionals. The ideal resource would be highly publicized, well moderated and present information that is comprehensive, yet not over the heads of the intended audience. This study points to the need to go where youth already congregate -- *MySpace*, *Facebook* and other social networking sites -- to integrate positive healthy norms, critical health information and in-person resources for youth in crisis.

## Demographics of Respondents

The survey targeted a regionally diverse group of young adult males and females in the United States, totaling 1,628 respondents, 53% female, 47% male. Over seventy six percent (76.67%) identified as Caucasian, 12.03% Asian-American, 9.21% Latino American, 5.40% African American and 1.29% identified as Other.

The mean age was 18.9, with ages distributed as follows:



## Internet Access and Use amongst Youth

Several questions were geared towards gaining an understanding of this population's internet use and habits. Most respondents access the internet from home and spend over 15 hours a week online.

### Q.6

*About how much time do you spend online each week (on average)?*

1-3 Hours	5%
4-10 Hours	27%
10-15 Hours	26%
>15 Hours	41%

### Q.7

*Where do you access the Internet?  
Check all that apply.*

Home	96.19%
School	42.3%
Library	20.26%
Cell Phone	17%
Other	11%

Within the "Other" category of Q7, 8.5% stated they access the internet from work. A small number of respondents access the internet from coffee shops, friends' homes, gaming consoles or handheld devices.

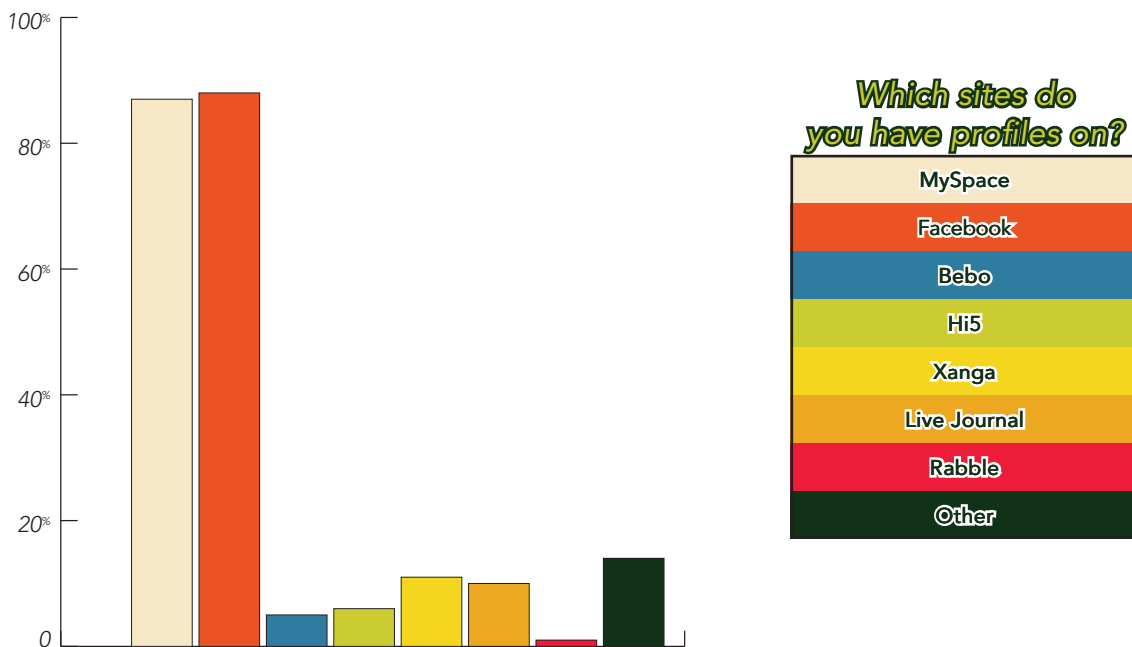
## Youth and Social Networking

Given the wide appeal of social networking sites across this population, our group sought to gain a better understanding of which sites youth frequently use and in what capacity.

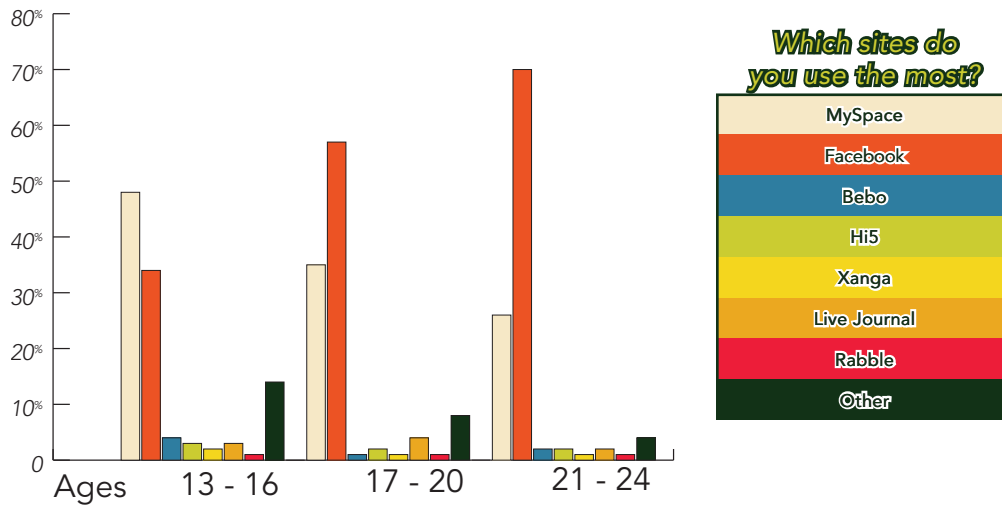
Ninety seven percent (97%) of the respondents have at least one online profile; 73% have multiple profiles. Responses indicate that most youth use online social networks as a medium to connect with existing “offline” friends. Three fourths of the respondents have met most of the people in their online networks through school or other activities and 20% have social networks that include mix of people they have met both on and offline.

Still, 7% of the respondents have online social networks consisting predominately of people they have met over the internet. This suggests online relationships are likely a pivotal social outlet and source of support for many young people.

*Facebook* and *MySpace* were by far the most popular and frequently used sites, 77% of the respondents have profiles on at least one of these sites. The following chart depicts the answers to this forced choice question. Social networking sites written in the ‘Other’ category included *My Yearbook* (1.4%), *Gaia Online* (1%), and *Friendster* (.04%).



In terms of which social networking sites are most frequently used, youth in the 13-16 age range showed a preference for *MySpace*. Partiality towards *Facebook* increases with respondent age.



### Youth Views on Mental Health/Wellness

Several questions were asked in an effort to assess youth views on mental health/wellness related issues. In a forced choice question respondents were asked to rank the importance of issues from the following list.

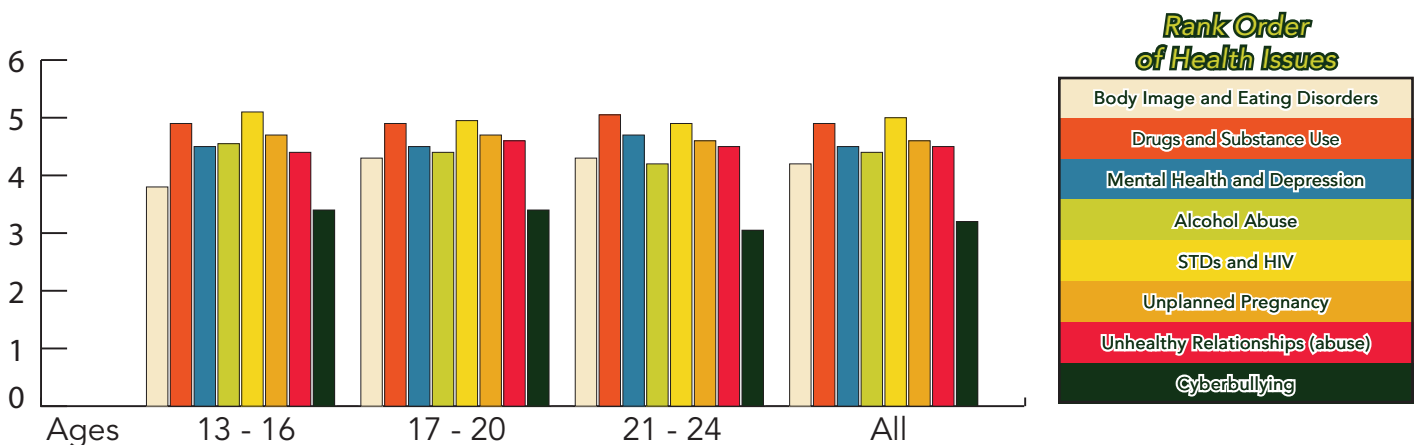
#### Q.13

Order the following issues from 1-8

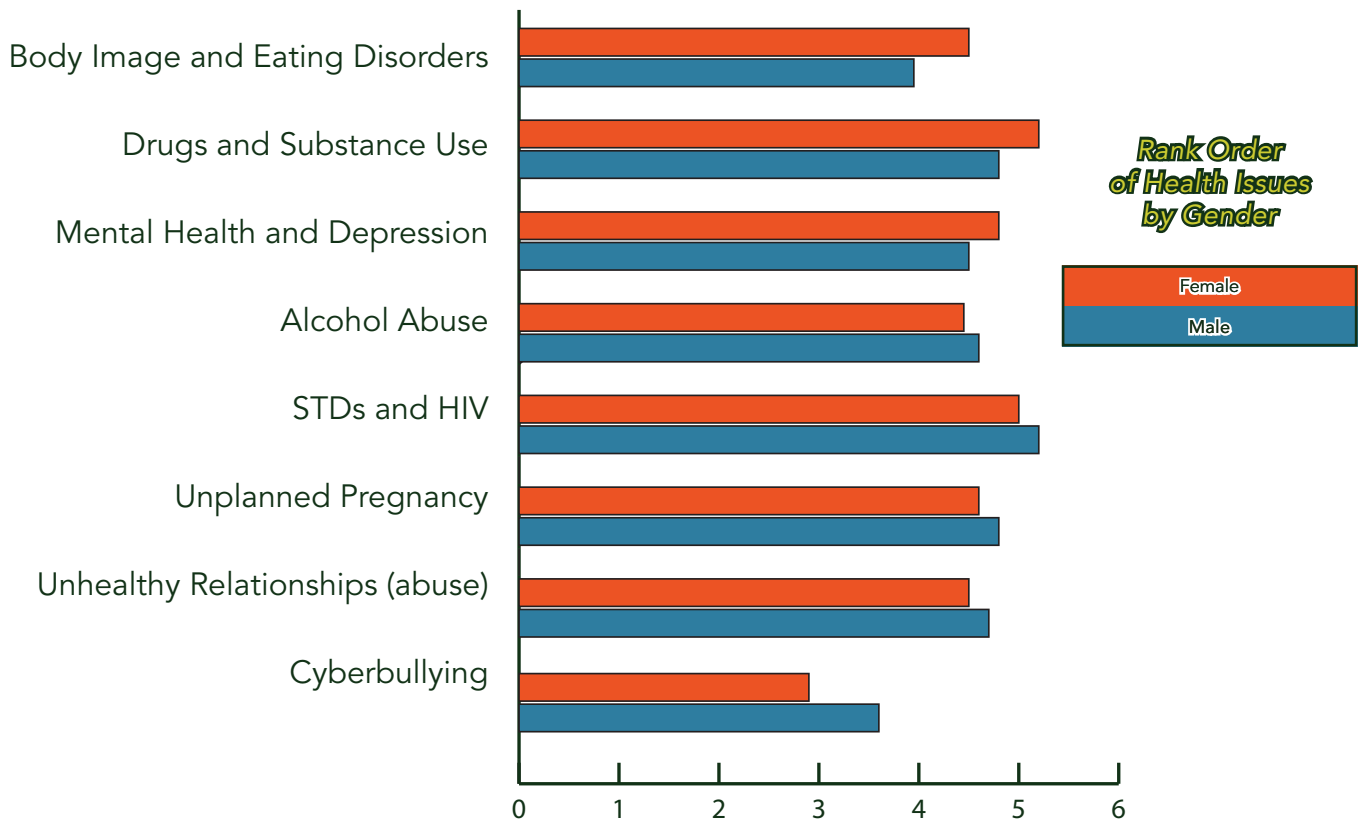
1. STDs and HIV
2. Drugs and Substance Use
3. Unplanned Pregnancy
4. Unhealthy Relationships (abuse)
5. Mental Health and Depression
6. Alcohol Abuse
7. Body Image and Eating Disorders
8. Cyberbullying

**STDs and HIV** were seen as the most important issue, followed by **Drugs and Substance Abuse**, then **Unplanned Pregnancy**.

Answers were fairly consistent across all age groups and ethnicities, although **Body Image and Eating Disorders** was ranked successively higher by older respondents.



Ranked issues were also fairly consistent by gender, although males rated cyberbullying higher.



In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to list the words related to unhealthy teen behaviors. **Drugs** were the most frequent response, followed by answers related to **sexual activity** and **pregnancy**. **Smoking, poor eating** and **lack of exercise** were highly cited as unhealthy behaviors as well. Issues mentioned with the corresponding frequency are provided below.

### Q.12

<i>When it comes to unhealthy teen behaviors, list the words that come to mind.</i>	<i>Frequency of times mentioned (1626 respondents)</i>
Drugs	665
Sex/STDs/Pregnancy	448
Smoking	370
Poor Eating Habits	348
Alcohol	216
Lazy/Lack of Exercise	84
Games	49
Internet (dating, overuse, etc)	39
Wreckless Driving	33
Depression	33
Fighting	30
Gangs	24
Drunk Driving	23
Cutting	22
Anorexia	22
School (skipping, bad grades)	21
Bullying	16
Lying	15
Suicide	12
Guns	12
Acting Out/Attitude	11
Meeting Strangers Offline	11
Porn	10

## Access to Mental Health/Wellness Related Information

Several survey questions assessed how youth access mental health/wellness related information and their views on existing resources. 10% of the respondents have used a hotline to get information or support, most of whom (80%) contacted the resource via phone (versus text, IM or chat). Most respondents indicated youth prefer to get information from peers, but recognize the need to seek help from professionals as well.

### Q.16

*List and describe any sites you visit for information about mental health issues, sexuality or general wellness*

One of the more surprising findings was that more than half of the respondents stated they use the internet for information about mental health, sexual or general wellness issues. Search engines were frequently cited by those who do use the internet in this capacity, suggesting there are few well known sites that serve as a hub for youth-friendly health information. Sites mentioned included:

Web MD	15.10%
Google	11.83%
Wikipedia	3.94%
Yahoo	3.27%
Health.com	1.05%
Plannedparenthood.com	1.05%
Mayoclinic.com	0.86%

17% of the respondents have visited a confession-oriented site or a message board and anonymously shared something personal. Of this group, 56% were male and 46% female, suggesting this type of resource appeals to both genders. More striking, of the people who have used these sites, 87% reported positive experiences.

### Q. 22

*If yes, how did it [posting on the site] make you feel?*

"It felt like I could finally breathe."

"It was a relief to get something off of my chest and have reassuring and friendly people giving me advice."

"I felt a bit relieved to be able to tell my story. It didn't really matter what other people had to say about it."

*Responses suggest sites are most helpful when they include both accurate, accessible information and a community where users can interact and obtain personal support from both peers and professionals.*

#### Q. 17

*What is helpful about these sites?*

*"It helped me understand what I was going through and also other issues that I came across and never thought about before. It is also nice to be able to have an outside source, because it can be embarrassing to talk about it to someone you know, like your parents or your friends."*

*"QA [queerattitude.com] was great for me when I was first coming out. There people between 14 and 23 years old can connect, offer/seek advice, and really talk about what it's like to be a younger member of the queer community today."*

*"They are backed by people who know what they're talking about and are certified in it - they don't have a political advantage for putting out things other than the truth."*

*"They give information not just from fact, but personal experiences."*

*"Good information as well as forums where you can get support from other people with your issues."*

Respondents cautioned about the importance of moderating these communities and keeping "haters" out.

*"Even though one anonymously tells someone how they feel, over the internet, if you aren't in the right site, which I wasn't, you'll get haters... the most common response I got from that self-seeking help was I was emo and I didn't need an ignoring boyfriend."*

*"Just make sure it's a friendly and open place. If someone goes there for help with a self injury issue, such as cutting... make sure no one is telling the emo joke "I wish my lawn were emo so it would cut itself." I hear that way too often, and it hurts people. And if there is a section on homosexuality, or how to deal with the associated bullying or the HIV/AIDS... just make sure that there are rules against gay-bashing... and that those rules are followed. People need to feel that it will be a place where they can escape to, and share their problems, and not have to worry about being judged."*

Respondents were also asked to list suggestions for a new site geared towards youth mental health/wellness issues. A surprising number of respondents stressed the importance of **publicizing** the resource. **Safety and anonymity** were also important aspects, followed by **ease of use**. It was important to have information that is **comprehensive, accurate** and presented at a level that is easily digestible (**not too technical**). Many respondents suggested the importance of **linking an**

**online resource with offline referrals or communities.** An ideal site would have information driven and overseen by professionals, but incorporate peer advice, a supportive online community and present the information in fun, interactive ways.

## Summary

The results of this survey suggest that the predominate health issues for youth appear to be linked to substance abuse and risky sexual behaviors, although a significant number of respondents discussed poor nutrition and lack of exercise. Issues related to the Internet, such as online safety, and cyberbullying were mentioned but with far less frequency.

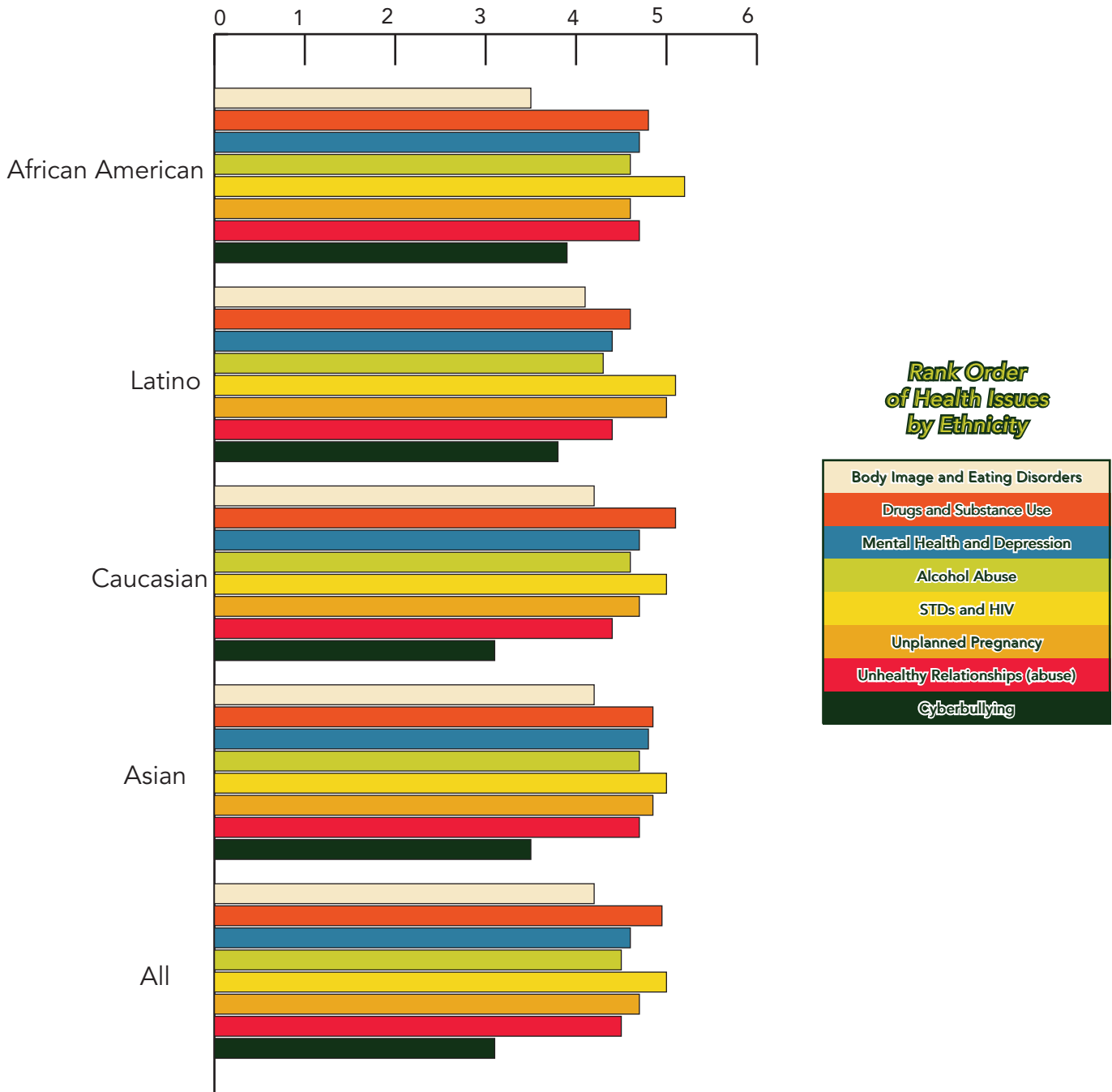
Half of our sample stated they use the internet to access mental health/wellness related information, listing a variety of sites. With the exception of Web MD, search engines predominately topped the list. **This suggests there are few well known youth oriented sites focusing on mental health/wellness issues.**

Youth are predominately accessing these sites to gain reliable information and obtain support from peers. Frequent complaints about existing resources are that the information is difficult to find, too technical or lacks an interactive/personal component. Respondents felt an ideal resource would be comprehensive, easy to find (well publicized) and overseen by professionals, but would include a peer support network. Responses highlighted the need for such a community to be safe, confidential and well moderated.

**This study points to the need for health professionals be present where youth already congregate -- MySpace, Facebook, and other social networking sites -- to integrate positive healthy norms, critical health information, and in-person resources for youth in crisis.**

Important Health Issues	Body Image and Eating Disorders	Drugs and Substance Use	Mental Health and Depression	Alcohol Abuse	STDs and HIV	Unplanned Pregnancy	Unhealthy Relationships (abuse)	Cyberbullying
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African American	3.52	4.88	4.82	4.65	5.20	4.67	4.77	3.90
Latino	4.09	4.70	4.52	4.45	5.16	5.06	4.48	3.86
Caucasian	4.31	5.10	4.66	4.52	5.04	4.71	4.49	3.16
Asian	4.31	4.78	4.76	4.61	5.07	4.76	4.52	3.52
All	4.27	5.01	4.67	4.51	5.05	4.75	4.52	3.30





## About Ypulse

[www.ypulse.com](http://www.ypulse.com)

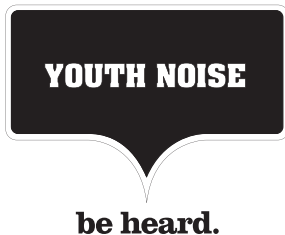
Ypulse is an independent media platform for youth media and marketing professionals. The daily Ypulse.com blog reaches a highly influential audience of youth-focused agency, brand and media executives, and social marketers.



## About ISIS

[www.isis-inc.org](http://www.isis-inc.org)

ISIS, Inc., based in Oakland CA, is a nonprofit organization working locally, nationally, and internationally to develop innovative sexual health resources through technology and effective collaboration among corporate, public, and nonprofit sector partners for awareness, education and prevention programs that improve people's lives.



## About YouthNoise

[www.youthnoise.org](http://www.youthnoise.org)

YouthNoise, equips a community of young leaders, dedicated to creating lasting positive change around the world, with the resources to build campaigns, amplify projects and perpetuate grassroots movements. YouthNoise offers an array of tools, content, web and mobile technologies, mentorship and peer support that youth leverage to take action on a variety of social issues including poverty, health, education, environment and violence.