
Highlights of the 2003 *OSDUS* Mental Health and Well-Being Report

This *eBulletin* highlights some of the key findings from the report “*The Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students, 1991-2003: Detailed OSDUS Findings*”. The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (*OSDUS*) is an anonymous in-class survey of 7th- to 12th-graders conducted every two years in Ontario schools.

Family and School Life

- Almost three-quarters (73%) of Ontario students live with both natural parents, one-in-six (16%) live with a single parent (more often the mother), 9% live in a step-family, and 2% do not live with either natural parent.
- A majority of students (about 85%) feel a connection to their school, and almost all (91%) students feel safe at school. However, 12% are worried about being harmed or threatened at school.

Physical Health

- Although a majority (54%) of students report that they are in excellent or very good health, about 13% indicate that they are in poor health.
- Over one-third (37%) do not meet the current health recommendation of engaging in at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise at least 3 times weekly. One-in-six (16%) were not physically active at all during the 7 days before the survey.

Health Care Utilization

- Less than two-thirds (60%) of students visited a physician at least once during the year before the survey,

and about 11% of students visited a mental health professional at least once.

- Over one-third (35%) of students were treated for a physical injury at least once during the past year.
- About 6% of students used barbiturates for medical reasons, 6% used medical stimulants, 3% used tranquilizers, and 2.5% used Ritalin.
- About 4% report they were prescribed medication to treat either depression, or anxiety, or both of these problems during the past year.

Mental Health

- One-in-ten (10%) students report low self-esteem.
- About 6% of students report an elevated risk for depression.
- Just under one-third (31%) report elevated psychological distress.
- About one-in-eight (12%) students had serious thoughts about suicide in the past year.

Violent Behaviour

- About one-in-eight (12%) students assaulted someone at least once during the past year.
- One-in-ten (10%) report carrying a weapon.
- 6% report gang fighting.

Violence on School Property

- Under one-in-five (18%) of students report fighting on school property at least once during the past year.
- 8% were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property at least once during the past year.
- One-third (33%) of students have been bullied at school since September. Specifically, the most prevalent form of victimization is verbal (27%), while 4% of students were bullied physically, and 2% were victims of theft or vandalism.
- Under one-third (30%) of students report taking part in bullying other students at school. The most prevalent form of bullying others is through verbal attacks (25%), followed by physical attacks (4%), and theft or vandalism (1%).

Gambling

- About one-quarter (24%) of students played cards for money at least once in the past year. About one-in-five (22%) played lottery tickets, and the same proportion (20%) bet money in sports pools. The least prevalent activities are Internet gambling and casino gambling (about 2% each).
- 6% of students can be considered to be heavy gamblers, and about 4% of students report signs of pathological gambling.

Co-existing Problems

- Overall, the majority (52%) of students report none of the following 4 problems examined: psychological distress, hazardous drinking, drug problem, and delinquent behaviour. About 28% report 1 of these problems, 10% report 2 problems, 7% report 3 problems, and 3% report all 4 problems.
- One-in-ten (10%) report 3 or all 4 of these problems.

Important Demographic Differences

Not controlling for other factors, findings suggest that females are more likely than males to report:

- poor health;
- low self-esteem;
- psychological distress;
- depressive symptoms;
- serious thoughts about suicide;
- feeling overweight; and
- visiting a mental health professional.

Males are more likely to report:

- medical Ritalin use;
- being treated for an injury;
- delinquent behaviour;
- violent behaviour;
- being a victim of bullying;
- bullying others;
- heavy gambling; and
- symptoms of a pathological gambling problem.

The following problems typically increase with grade and peak in grade 10 or 11 (not controlling for other factors):

- poor health;
- psychological distress;
- visiting a mental health professional;
- delinquent behaviour; and
- co-existing problems.

The following tend to decrease with grade:

- physical fighting at school;
- being a victim of bullying; and
- bullying others.

Some Changes Over Time

Reports of the following have decreased over time, among the total sample of students:

- symptoms of a pathological gambling problem;
- medical Ritalin use;
- weapon carrying;
- assaulting someone;
- vandalism; and
- theft.

Over the past decade, reports of the following have increased among the total sample of students:

- self-rated poor health; and
- selling cannabis.

Methods:

The *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)* is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary (grades 7 and 8) and secondary (grades 9-12) school students conducted every two years since 1977. The 2003 survey, which used a stratified (region) two-stage cluster design (school, class) included 6,616 students in grades 7 to 12 from 37 school boards, 126 schools, and 383 classes. Self-administered questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University on a classroom basis between January and June 2003. The student participation rate was 72%.

All survey estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design. The 2003 sample size of 6,616 students represents about 970,000 students in grades 7 to 12 in public and Catholic schools across the province.

Terminology:

- **Low Self-Esteem** is defined as responding negatively to at least 3 out of 6 items adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.
- **Risk for Depression** is defined as “usually” or “often” experiencing all 4 symptoms from the CES-D (past 7 days time frame).
- **Elevated Psychological Distress** is measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), which is a 12-item screening instrument designed to assess current mental health problems. The items assess the recent frequency of experiencing 12 symptoms (e.g., stress, depression, problem making decisions). Distress is defined as experiencing at least 3 of the 12 symptoms.
- **Hazardous Drinking** is measured by the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), which is a 10-item instrument designed to detect a drinking problem at the less severe end of the spectrum. The percentage reported here is based on a score of at least 8 out of 40.
- **Drug Problem** is measured by the CRAFFT-D screener, which is a 6-item instrument designed to detect a drug problem that requires treatment. Experiencing 2 or more of the 6 problems indicates a potential drug problem.
- **Pathological Gambling Problem** is measured by the South Oaks Gambling Screen Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA), and is defined as experiencing 4 or more of the 12 symptoms during the past 12 months.
- **95% Confidence Interval (CI)** can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the “true” percentage value if every student in Ontario was surveyed.
- **Significant Difference** refers to a difference between two percentages that is not likely due to chance. For example, a difference found at the $p < .05$ level of statistical significance is one that is less than 5% likely to occur by chance alone.

Source:

Adlaf, E.M., Paglia-Boak, A., Beitchman, J.H., & Wolfe, D. (2004). *The Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students, 1991-2003: Detailed OSDUS Findings*. CAMH Research Document Series, No. 14. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (The report is available in PDF format at: http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html).

Suggested Citation:

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Highlights of the 2003 *OSDUS* Mental Health and Well-Being Report. *CAMH Population Studies eBulletin*, May/June 2004, Vol. 5, No.3. Toronto, Ontario: CAMH.

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