

Drug Use among Ontario Students: Does it Differ from American Students?

During the spring of 2003, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health conducted its 14th cycle of the *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*. The *OSDUS* is an Ontario-wide school survey of students in grades 7 to 12. Topics covered include drug use, mental and physical health, and gambling behaviours. The 2003 sample size of 6,616 students represents about 970,000 students in grades 7 to 12 across the province. This eBulletin compares drug use among Ontario students to use among American students, with the latter estimates based on the 2003 *Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF)* conducted across the United States.

Because the MTF study surveys students in grades 8, 10 and 12, we limit our drug use comparisons to these grades only. Table 1 presents the past year prevalence for drugs included in both surveys in 2003. One general observation is that Ontario students – especially 10th- and 12th-graders – are more likely to drink alcohol, get drunk, use cannabis, other hallucinogens and ecstasy than are their American counterparts (see grey shade in Table 1, and also see Figure 1).

Several other drugs show less prominent differences, yet with rates still elevated among Ontario students. For example, compared to American students, Ontario 10th-graders are more likely to report use of LSD, crack, heroin, and Rohypnol. Twelfth graders in Ontario are more likely to report use of PCP and cocaine.

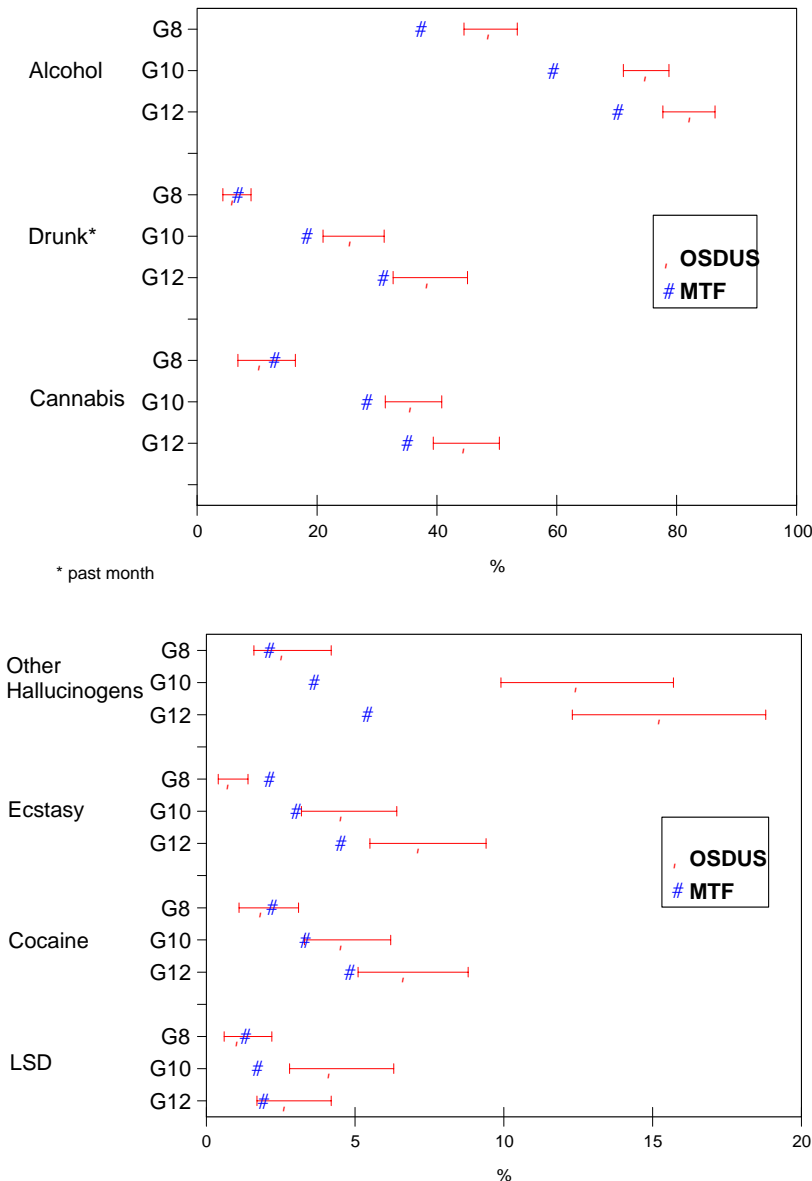
Table 1: Past Year Drug Use: 2003 OSDUS versus 2003 MTF

	Grade 8		Grade 10		Grade 12	
	2003 OSDUS % (95% CI)	2003 MTF %	2003 OSDUS % (95% CI)	2003 MTF %	2003 OSDUS % (95% CI)	2003 MTF %
Alcohol	48.9 (44.5-53.4)	37.2	75.1 (71.1-78.7)	59.3	82.5 (77.7-86.4)	70.1
Drunk (past month)	6.2 (4.3-9.0)	6.7	25.8 (21.0-31.2)	18.2	38.7 (32.7-45.1)	30.9
Cannabis	10.7 (6.8-16.4)	12.8	35.9 (31.4-40.8)	28.2	44.8 (39.4-50.4)	34.9
Glue or other Solvents	10.8 (8.1-14.3)	8.7	4.9 (3.6-6.6)	5.4	4.4 (3.0-6.4)	3.9
Barbiturates (NM)		n/a		n/a	1.8 (1.0-3.2)	6.0
Stimulants (NM)	3.7 (2.5-5.5)	5.5	6.6 (4.8-9.1)	9.0	7.8 (5.9-10.1)	9.9
Tranquillizers (NM)	1.2 (0.7-2.0)	2.7	2.4 (1.7-3.5)	5.3	2.7 (1.8-4.2)	6.7
LSD	1.1 (0.6-2.2)	1.3	4.2 (2.8-6.3)	1.7	2.7 (1.7-4.2)	1.9
PCP		n/a		n/a	2.7 (1.8-4.0)	1.3
Other Hallucinogens	2.6 (1.6-4.2)	2.1	12.5 (9.9-15.7)	3.6	15.3 (12.3-18.8)	5.4
Methamphetamine	0.9 (0.5-1.6)	2.5	4.2 (2.8-6.2)	3.3	3.6 (2.6-5.0)	3.2
Ice		n/a		n/a	1.5 (0.7-3.2)	2.0
Cocaine	1.9 (1.1-3.1)	2.2	4.6 (3.3-6.2)	3.3	6.7 (5.1-8.8)	4.8
Crack	1.7 (1.0-3.0)	1.6	3.0 (2.0-4.5)	1.6	2.5 (1.7-3.7)	2.2
Heroin	0.8 (0.4-1.6)	0.9	2.0 (1.2-3.5)	0.7	1.1 (0.6-2.0)	0.8
Ecstasy	0.8 (0.4-1.4)	2.1	4.6 (3.2-6.4)	3.0	7.2 (5.5-9.4)	4.5
GHB	<0.5%	0.9	0.9 (0.3-2.3)	1.4	<0.5%	1.4
Rohypnol	1.2 (0.5-2.7)	0.5	2.0 (1.0-4.0)	0.6	1.3 (0.5-3.2)	1.3
Ketamine	<0.5%	1.1	1.6 (0.8-3.2)	1.9	3.7 (2.1-6.5)	2.1
Ritalin (NM)	1.2 (0.6-2.4)	2.6	3.3 (2.2-5.0)	4.1	3.1 (2.0-4.6)	4.0

Notes: (1) ■ shaded OSDUS percentages indicate level significantly higher among Ontario students; (2) boxed MTF percentages indicate level significantly higher among American students; (3) CI = confidence interval; (4) NM = non-medical use; (5) n/a = not available.

On the other hand, American students in all three grades are more likely to use non-medical tranquilizers compared to Ontario students. Findings also suggest that American 8th-graders are more likely to use methamphetamine, ecstasy, and non-medical Ritalin, while 12th-graders are more likely to use non-medical barbiturates, compared to their counterparts in Ontario.

Figure 1. Past Year Use of Alcohol, Cannabis, Other Hallucinogens, Ecstasy, Cocaine, and LSD, OSDUS 2003 versus MTF 2003 (Grades 8, 10, and 12)



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 *Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF)* is an annual school survey of students in grades 8, 10 and 12 conducted across the United States. The 2003 MTF surveyed 48,500 students in 392 schools. The sample is representative of students in private and public secondary schools across the US.

To compare Ontario and American percentages, our criteria is whether or not the American percentage falls within the Ontario CI. Percentages outside the CI are considered significantly different. This is a crude method of determining a significant difference, given that CIs are not available for the American data.

Terminology:

- **Past Year Drug Use:** Unless otherwise indicated, percentages reflect use at least once during the 12 months before the survey.
- **95% Confidence Interval (CI)** can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the “true” percentage value if every adult 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.

Sources:

Adlaf, E.M., & Paglia, A. (2003). *Drug Use Among Ontario Students, 1977-2003: Detailed OSDUS Findings*. CAMH Research Document Series, No. 13. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (The report is available in PDF format at: http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html).

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