

The 2003 OSDUS Mental Health and Well-Being Report Executive Summary

The Data

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*, is the longest ongoing school survey of adolescents in Canada. The study, which spans over two decades, is based on 14 surveys conducted every two years since 1977. In the spring of 2003, 6,616 students (grades 7 to 12) from 37 school boards, 126 schools and 383 classes participated in the survey administered by the Institute for Social Research, York University. This report describes physical health and mental health indicators in 2003 and changes since 1991, and is a companion document to the report *Drug Use Among Ontario Students, 1977-2003: Detailed OSDUS Findings*. All data are based on self-reports derived from anonymous questionnaires administered in classrooms.

Topics that are new to this 2003 report are: physical injuries sustained during the past year that required medical attention, trends in medical drug use since 1977, type of bullying involvement, and internet gambling. We also examined the overlap between substance use problems, mental health problems, and delinquent behaviour.

Family and School

- 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.
- Almost all students (91%) feel safe in their school. However, 12% are worried about being harmed or threatened at school.

Social Health

- Just over half (57%) get along very well with their parents, 38% get along "ok", and 5% do not get along at all with their parents.
- A small percentage (5%) of students have no one to talk to about their problems.

Physical Health

- Although a majority (54%) of students report that they are in excellent or very good health, about 13% report poor health. Females are more likely to report being in poor health compared to males (15% vs 10%, respectively).
- A majority (63%) of students were physically active on 3 or more days during the 7 days before the survey. One-in-six (16%) were physically inactive during this time period. There is no significant sex difference regarding inactivity.
- Significantly more students rated their health as poor in 2003 (12%) compared to their counterparts in 1991 (6%; among grades 7, 9, 11 only).
- The percentage of students reporting no physical activity has remained stable between 1997 and 2003.

Health Care Utilization

Physical Health Care

- Less than two-thirds (60%) of students visited a physician at least once during the 12 months before the survey. Compared to males, females are significantly more likely to report at least one visit to a physician (54% vs 66%, respectively).

- ❑ Over one-third (35%) of students were treated for a physical injury at least once during the past 12 months. Males are more likely to have been treated for an injury compared to females (38% vs 33%, respectively).

Mental Health Care

- ❑ About 11% of students visited a mental health professional at least once during the past 12 months. Females are more likely than males to report visiting a mental health professional (14% vs 8%, respectively).

Medical Drug Use

- ❑ Among all students, 6% used barbiturates for medical reasons (about 53,900 students), 6% used medical stimulants (about 54,700 students), 3% used tranquillizers (about 25,800), and 2.5% used Ritalin (about 24,400).
- ❑ Among these four drugs, only two show a significant sex difference: males are more likely than females to use tranquillizers (3% vs 2%, respectively), and males are more likely than females to use Ritalin (4% vs 2%).
- ❑ A small proportion (2%) of students report that they had been prescribed medication to treat depression in the past year. Just under 1% of students were prescribed medication for anxiety. Another 2% were prescribed medication for both their depression and anxiety.
- Between 1999 and 2003, there was a significant decline in medical barbiturate use among the total sample (from 13% down to 6%). Medical Ritalin use significantly declined among the total sample in 2003 (2%) compared to 1999 (4%). Ritalin use also declined among males (from 6% in 1999 to 4% in 2003) and 8th-graders (5% to 2%). There were no significant changes over the short-term in the medical use of stimulants or tranquillizers.

Internalizing Indicators

Low Self-Esteem

- ❑ One-in-ten (10%) students report indicators of low self-esteem, with females more likely to do so than males (11% vs 7%).
- Between 1995 and 2003, there have been no changes in reported low self-esteem among the total sample.

Depressive Symptoms

- ❑ About 6% of students are at elevated risk for depression. Females are more likely to be at risk than males (8% vs 3%).
- Between 1997 and 2003, there were no significant changes in the risk for depression among the total sample, or among subgroups.

Elevated Psychological Distress

- ❑ Just under one-third (31%) of students indicate elevated psychological distress, with females more likely to do so than males (39% vs 22%, respectively).
- ❑ The most common symptom experienced by students is the feeling of being constantly under stress (38%), followed by losing sleep because of worrying (29%).
- Among the total sample, psychological distress significantly increased from 26% in 2001 up to 31% in 2003. Note that the 2003 level corresponds to the previous 1999 level (30%).

Suicide Ideation

- ❑ About one-in-eight (12%) students had serious thoughts about suicide in the past 12 months, with significantly more females than males reporting so (17% vs 8%, respectively).
- Suicide ideation did not significantly change between 2001 and 2003.

Body Image

- ❑ Over two-thirds (69%) of all students are satisfied with their weight. One-fifth (20%) feel they are too fat, while one-tenth (11%) feel they are too thin.
- ❑ Over one-third (38%) of students are not trying to do anything about their weight. Another third (29%) are trying to lose weight; 21% want to keep from gaining weight, and 12% want to gain weight.
- ❑ Females are significantly more likely to believe that they are too fat, compared to males (26% vs 13%, respectively), whereas males are more likely to believe that they are too thin compared to females (16% vs 7%).

Externalizing Indicators

Overall Delinquent Behaviour

- ❑ About one-in-seven (14%) students report engaging in three or more delinquent acts during the past year. Such behaviour is more prevalent among males than females (18% vs 11%, respectively), and tends to peak in grades 10 and 11.
- ❑ Among the 12 delinquent acts surveyed, the 3 most frequent were: property damage (15%), theft under \$50 (15%), and beating up someone (12%). The least reported act was selling drugs other than cannabis (3%).
- Between 1999 and 2003, the percentage of students reporting at least 3 of the 12 acts significantly declined, from 19% to 14%. There was a significant decline among males during this time period (from 26% in 1999 to 18% in 2003), but not among females.

Non-Violent Acts

- ❑ Males are significantly more likely than females to report each of the non-violent acts (such as theft, vandalism, selling drugs) except for being thrown out of one's home.
- Between 1999 and 2003, only reports of vandalism changed among the total sample,

decreasing from 24% in 1999 to 15% in 2003.

- Reports of vandalism and theft under \$50 are lower in 2003 compared to reports from the early 1990s (among grades 7, 9, 11 only).
- The percentage of students (in grades 7, 9, 11 only) reporting selling cannabis is significantly higher in 2003 (8%) compared to 1991 (3%).

Violent Acts

- ❑ About one in eight (12%) assaulted someone at least once during the past year. One-in-ten (10%) report carrying a weapon, and 6% report participating in gang fighting. Males are significantly more likely than females to report each of these three violent behaviours.
- Over the short-term, the percentage of students reporting assaulting someone significantly declined between 1999 and 2001 (from 20% to 13%), and still remains relatively low in 2003 at 12%.
- Reported weapon carrying significantly declined between 1999 (14%) and 2003 (10%).
- Between 1999 and 2003, no significant changes were found for gang fighting among the total sample of students.

School Violence and Bullying

- ❑ Among all students, 18% report fighting on school property at least once during the past year, with males more likely than females to do so (27% vs 9%, respectively).
- ❑ Among all students, 8% report having been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property at least once during the past year. Males are significantly more likely than females to report experiencing this (10% vs 6%, respectively).

- ❑ About one-third (33%) of students have been bullied at school since September. The most prevalent form of bullying victimization is verbal (27%), while 4% were bullied physically, and 2% were victims of theft/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/vandalism (1%).
- ❑ Bullying involvement is significantly more likely among males than females, and among the younger grades.

Gambling

Gambling Activities

- ❑ 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 activity is casino gambling (2%).
- ❑ Internet gambling was reported by about 2% of students.
- ❑ Among all students, 6% gambled in at least 5 of the 10 activities asked about, and this group can be considered to be heavy gamblers.
- ❑ Males are more likely than females to engage in eight of the ten gambling activities. Males are also more likely to report heavy gambling than females (10% vs 3%).

Gambling Problem

- ❑ About 4% of students report signs of pathological gambling, with males more likely to do so than females (6% vs 1%, respectively).

- The percentage of students reporting a pathological gambling problem significantly declined between 1999 and 2003, from 6% to 4%. This decline was also evident among males (from 10% to 6%).

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.
- ❑ The percentage reporting 3 or all 4 of these problems is 10%, which represents about 100,200 students across Ontario.

Common Risk Factors

The report also profiles some factors related to nine health risk outcomes: depression; psychological distress; suicide ideation; delinquency; pathological gambling; hazardous drinking; any illicit drug use including cannabis; any illicit drug use excluding cannabis; and co-existing problems.

In order of importance, the factors associated with these outcomes (while controlling for other factors) were as follows:

- ❑ the parent-child relationship (9 of 9 outcomes)
- ❑ parental monitoring (8 of 9 outcomes)
- ❑ school marks (7 of 9)
- ❑ sex (6 of 9)
- ❑ grade; family immigrant status; school attachment (5 of 9)
- ❑ family structure (3 of 9)
- ❑ school safety; region (2 of 9)
- ❑ parents' education; school mobility (0 of 9).

Major Mental Health and Well-Being Indicators, Ontario Students, G7-12, 2003

Indicator	Estimated Number of Ontario Students	Total	Males	Females	
% poor health (current)	122,000	12.6	9.9	15.2	*
% physically inactive (past 7 days)	152,400	16.1	15.6	16.5	
% treated for a physical injury (past year)	336,900	35.4	38.0	33.0	*
% used Ritalin medically (past year)	24,400	2.5	3.5	1.6	*
% reporting 1+ mental health care visits (past year)	103,400	11.0	8.1	13.7	*
% low self-esteem (current)	89,600	9.5	7.3	11.4	*
% at elevated risk for depression (past 7 days)	55,200	5.6	2.6	8.4	*
% psychological distress (past few weeks)	303,300	30.8	22.2	38.7	*
% suicide ideation (past year)	122,100	12.5	7.9	16.8	*
% 3+ delinquent acts (past year)	135,500	14.3	18.4	10.6	*
% carrying a weapon (past year)	90,200	9.6	14.9	4.9	*
% fighting at school (past year)	168,100	17.6	26.8	9.2	*
% threatened/injured with weapon at school (past year)	73,200	7.7	10.1	5.5	*
% been bullied (since September)	310,300	32.7	35.3	30.3	*
% bullied others (since September)	282,900	29.7	34.9	25.1	*
% 5+ gambling activities (past year)	58,000	6.1	9.6	3.0	*
% pathological gambling problem (past year)	33,800	3.5	6.0	1.1	*
% reporting 3 or all 4 co-existing problems	100,200	10.1	10.4	9.8	

Notes: the estimated number of students is based on a student population of about 970,000; * indicates a significant sex difference ($p < .05$), not controlling for other factors.

Indicator	G7	G8	G9	G10	G11	G12	
% poor health (current)	6.8	9.8	11.4	14.8	16.6	14.9	*
% physically inactive (past 7 days)	18.5	11.5	16.2	16.9	16.2	16.5	
% treated for a physical injury (past year)	32.5	36.3	38.3	35.1	36.0	33.6	
% used Ritalin medically (past year)	3.7	2.4	2.8	2.6	2.6	1.1	
% reporting 1+ mental health care visits (past year)	10.0	10.3	9.0	11.1	14.4	11.0	*
% low self-esteem (current)	9.0	7.7	9.9	10.7	9.8	9.1	
% at elevated risk for depression (past 7 days)	4.0	8.1	4.2	5.7	7.3	4.6	
% psychological distress (past few weeks)	20.8	23.6	26.9	34.0	38.6	37.8	*
% suicide ideation (past year)	9.8	16.7	11.1	12.4	14.8	10.5	
% 3+ delinquent acts (past year)	10.9	9.8	13.7	17.4	18.4	13.7	*
% carrying a weapon (past year)	9.9	6.6	12.2	8.6	11.8	8.0	
% fighting at school (past year)	29.7	26.0	19.6	14.5	11.0	8.8	*
% threatened/injured with weapon at school (past year)	7.3	9.8	7.6	10.0	6.8	4.6	
% been bullied (since September)	47.1	38.7	32.8	32.6	28.7	19.8	*
% bullied others (since September)	31.7	32.2	32.7	30.5	29.4	22.1	*
% 5+ gambling activities (past year)	5.8	4.5	5.9	4.8	7.2	7.9	
% pathological gambling problem (past year)	2.4	2.0	3.0	4.2	3.7	5.0	
% reporting 3 or all 4 co-existing problems	3.7	4.6	8.4	12.9	15.5	13.2	*

* indicates a significant grade difference ($p < .05$), not controlling for other factors.

Overview of Selected Trends in Mental Health and Well-Being Indicators among the Total Sample of Ontario Students

Indicator	Period	Among Grades	Change
<i>% poor health (current)</i>	1991-2003	G7, G9, G11	Increased from 6% to 12%
<i>% physically inactive (past 7 days)</i>	1991-2003	G7, G9, G11	Stable
<i>% reporting 1+ physical health care visits (past year)</i>	1999-2003	G7 to G12	Decreased from 70% to 60%
<i>% used Ritalin medically (past year)</i>	1999-2003	G7 to G12	Decreased from 13% to 6%
<i>% used barbiturates medically (past year)</i>	1999-2003	G7 to G12	Decreased from 4% to 2%
<i>% reporting 1+ mental health care visits (past year)</i>	1999-2003	G7 to G12	Stable
<i>% low self-esteem (current)</i>	1995-2003	G7, G9, G11	Stable
<i>% at elevated risk for depression (past 7 days)</i>	1997-2003	G7, G9, G11	Stable
<i>% psychological distress (past few weeks)</i>	1999-2003	G7 to G12	Fluctuated: increased from 26% in 2001 to 31% in 2003, but 2003 % is similar to 1999 (30%)
<i>% suicide ideation (past year)</i>	2001-2003	G7 to G12	Stable
<i>% pathological gambling problem (past year)</i>	1999-2003	G7 to G12	Decreased from 6% to 3.5%
<i>% 3+ delinquent acts (past year)</i>	1993-2003	G7, G9, G11	Peaked in 1997 (21%), decreased to 14% in recent years (2001-2003)
<i>% carrying a weapon (past year)</i>	1993-2003	G7, G9, G11	Peaked in 1993 (16%), steadily decreased to 9% in 2001, and still relatively low (11%)
<i>% assaulting someone (past year)</i>	1991-2003	G7, G9, G11	Peaked in 1997 (22%), decreased to 12% in recent years (2001-2003)
<i>% gang fighting (past year)</i>	1991-2003	G7, G9, G11	Stable
<i>% vandalizing property (past year)</i>	1991-2003	G7, G9, G11	Peaked in 1999 at 23%, decreased to 15% in recent years (2001-2003)
<i>% reporting theft < \$50 (past year)</i>	1991-2003	G7, G9, G11	Peaked in 1995 (21%), decreased to about 14% in recent years (2001-2003)
<i>% selling cannabis (past year)</i>	1991-2003	G7, G9, G11	Increased from 3% to 8%

Notes: the changes presented are based on the total sample of students; subgroup changes are not presented.