

Cannabis Use Among Ontario Students

This *eBulletin* looks at past year cannabis use among students in Ontario according to selected demographic characteristics. Data are from the 2015 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS). The OSDUHS is a repeated, cross-sectional, anonymous survey of students in grades 7–12 in Ontario’s publicly funded schools, with the purpose of monitoring drug use, mental health, physical health, gambling, and other risk behaviours. Conducted every two years since 1977, the OSDUHS is the longest ongoing school survey in Canada and one of the longest running in the world.

About one-in-five (21.3%) students in grades 7–12 used cannabis at least once in the past year (representing about 203,900 students in Ontario). Males and females were equally likely to use cannabis (22.0% vs. 20.5%, respectively). Use according to sex-by-grade level is presented in Figure 1. For both sexes, there were significant increases in the likelihood of using cannabis as grade level increases.

Cannabis use estimates according to other demographic characteristics are presented in Figure 2. Use did not significantly differ between students who lived in rural areas and students who lived in urban/suburban areas (25.0% vs. 21.0%, respectively). There was a significant difference in cannabis use according to whether or not the student was born in Canada. Those who reported being born in Canada were significantly more likely to use cannabis compared with students who reported they were not born in Canada (23.8% vs. 11.4%, respectively). Students who ranked their family’s socioeconomic status (SES) as below average were significantly more likely to use cannabis (25.5%) compared with students who ranked their family SES as either average or above average (about 20%).

Figure 1
Percentage of Ontario Students Reporting Cannabis Use in the Past Year by Sex and Grade, 2015 OSDUHS

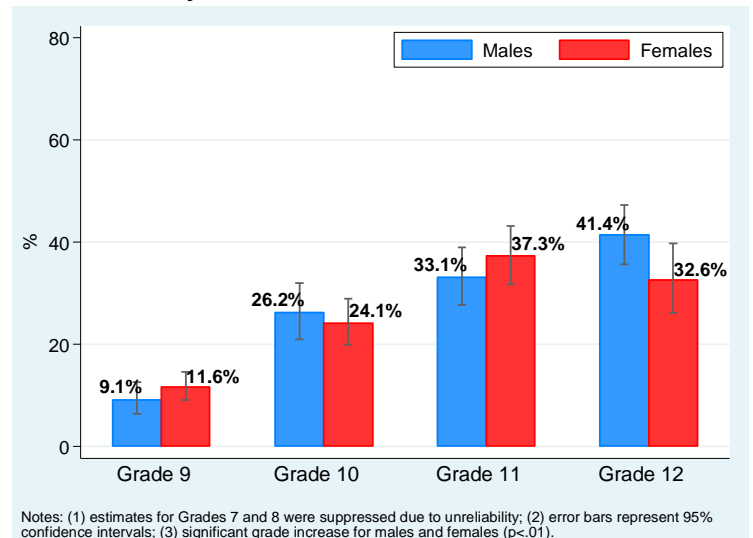
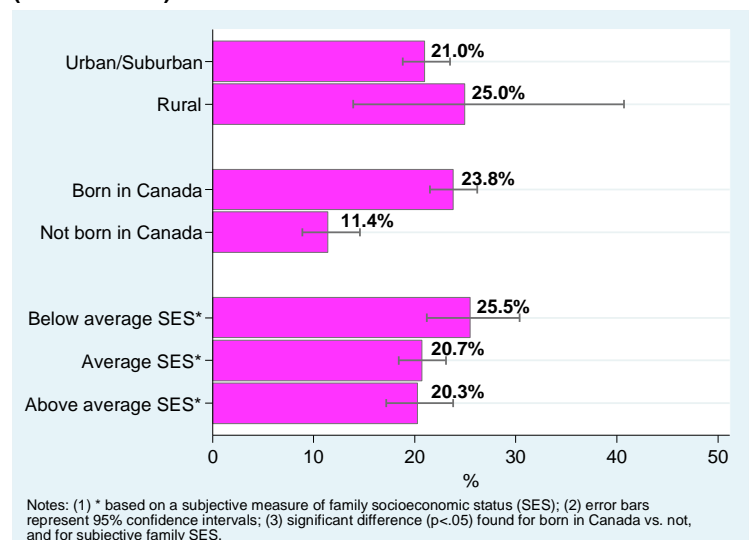


Figure 2
Percentage of Ontario Students Reporting Cannabis Use in the Past Year by Other Demographic Characteristics, 2015 OSDUHS (Grades 7–12)



Methods

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary/middle school students in grades 7 and 8 and secondary school students in grades 9 through 12. This repeated cross-sectional survey has been conducted every two years since 1977. The 2015 survey, which used a stratified (region by school level) two-stage (school, class) cluster design, was based on **10,426 students in grades 7 through 12** in 750 classes, in 220 schools, in 43 public and Catholic school boards. Self-completed questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were group administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University in classrooms between November 2014 and June 2015. Sixty-three percent (63%) of selected schools, 88% of selected classes, and 59% of eligible students in participating classes completed the survey. Students in French-language schools completed French questionnaires. The 2015 total sample of 10,426 students is representative of just under one million students in grades 7 to 12 enrolled in Ontario's English and French publicly funded schools. All estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests accommodated the complex survey design.

Measures & Terminology

- **Past year cannabis use** was defined as using marijuana or hashish at least once during the 12 months before the survey. Cases that responded "don't know what cannabis is" were classified as non-users.
- **Urban/suburban vs. rural residence** was derived from the first three digits (Forward Sortation Area) of the school's postal code. The assumption is that students live in the same FSA as their school.
- **Subjective family socioeconomic status (SES)** was measured with the *MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status-Youth Version* which assesses youth's perceptions of their family's placement within society using an image of a 10-rung ladder. The question was "Imagine this ladder below shows how Canadian society is set up. At the top of the ladder are people who are the "best off" – they have the most money, the most education, and the jobs that bring the most respect. At the bottom are the people who are "worst off" – they have the least money, little education, no job or jobs that no one wants. Now think about your family. Please check off the numbered box that best shows where you think your family would be on this ladder." For this analysis, rungs 1-5 were considered to be "below average" family SES, rungs 6-8 were considered to be "average" family SES, and rungs 9 and 10 were considered to be "above average" family SES.
- **95% CI (confidence interval)** shows the probable accuracy of the estimate – that is, with repeated sampling, 95 of 100 sample CIs would contain the "true" population value. Design-based confidence intervals account for characteristics of the sample design (i.e., stratification, clustering, weighting).
- **Statistically significant difference** refers to a difference between (or among) estimates that is statistically different at the $p < .05$ level, or lower, after adjusting for the sampling design. A finding of statistical significance implies that any differences are not likely due to chance alone; it is not necessarily a finding of public health importance.

Source

Boak, A., Hamilton, H. A., Adlaf, E. M., & Mann, R. E. (2015). *Drug use among Ontario students, 1977–2015: Detailed OSDUHS findings* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 41). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [Available online at <http://www.camh.ca/osduhs>]

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