

Canadian Campus Survey, 2004

Highlights

The Survey

Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the overall objective of the 2004 Canadian Campus Survey is to build understanding regarding the individual, social and environmental determinants of hazardous drinking. This preliminary report describes (1) the prevalence of alcohol use, other drug use, mental health and gambling problems among Canadian undergraduates interviewed in 2004, (2) relationships between these outcomes and student characteristics, and (3) whether such outcomes have changed since a similar survey was conducted in 1998.

Methods

A random sample of 6,282 full-time university undergraduates (41% of eligible students) drawn from 40 universities completed questionnaires by mail (56%) or online (44%) during March and April 2004. Sixty-four universities with an enrolment of about 642,000 Canadian undergraduates, met the following criteria for inclusion: (1) had a Registrar, (2) had more than 1000 full-time degree undergraduates, (3) had students physically attend classes (i.e., online universities were excluded), (4) were publicly-funded, and (5) were non-military or non-theological. Of the 64 universities (69 campuses) that met the eligibility criteria, 40 (45 campuses) agreed to participate, representing completion rates of 63% of universities and 65% of campuses. The sample of 6,282 undergraduates averaged 22 years of age ranged in age between 16 and 65 years and included 2,248 men and 4,034 women. The sample comprised, 793 students from universities in British Columbia, 513 from the Prairies, 2,107 from Ontario, 2,076 from Québec and 793 from the Atlantic. In total, 1,088 (18%) lived on campus, while 2,585 (42%) lived off-campus with family, and 2,541 (41%) lived off-campus without family.

Main Findings

Indicator	Total	M	F	*	BC	PR	ON	QC	AC	*
Alcohol										
% Past year use	85.7	84.0	87.1	*	-78.5	86.9	84.2	+89.7	+90.9	*
% Past month use	77.1	76.5	77.7		-70.6	77.4	74.5	+83.3	+83.2	*
% heavy-frequent drinker	16.1	20.6	12.5	*	-11.7	14.6	18.8	-9.6	+24.5	*
% hazardous/harmful drinking (AUDIT8+)	32.0	37.6	27.5	*	-26.7	29.4	33.4	-26.6	+46.5	*
% 1+ harms (AUDIT)	43.9	45.9	42.4	*	-39.0	41.3	45.1	-40.2	+55.9	*
% 1+ dependence symptoms (AUDIT)	31.6	32.5	30.9	*	29.6	30.1	31.9	30.8	36.4	
% experiencing alcohol-related assault	10.0	10.8	9.3		-5.8	8.6	+12.6	-4.6	+16.1	*
% reporting alcohol-related sexual harassment	9.8	4.2	14.3	*	-7.4	-6.9	9.6	11.5	+14.8	*
% unplanned sexual relations due to alcohol	14.1	15.8	12.8	*	16.3	13.6	12.5	13.7	19.9	
Other drug use										
% Current smoker	12.7	12.0	13.2		-9.6	-8.9	11.2	+18.3	+16.9	*
% Cannabis (12m)	32.1	34.5	30.1	*	30.3	-19.4	33.0	+39.0	+36.9	*
% Cannabis (30d)	16.7	19.7	14.2	*	12.9	-9.6	17.5	+20.9	+20.6	*
% Any illicit (12m, exc. cannabis)	8.7	9.7	7.9		9.9	-4.5	8.2	+11.5	10.9	*
% Any illicit (30d, exc. cannabis)	2.2	2.3	2.1		+3.3	1.3	1.8	+3.1	2.2	*
Mental health										
% Elevated psychological distress	29.2	23.9	33.5	*	+30.7	24.8	+32.8	26.1	25.8	*
% at risk gamblers	7.9	10.5	5.9	*	7.2	7.1	8.3	6.6	+10.9	*
% moderate or severe gambling problems	3.7	6.7	1.3	*	2.8	4.6	4.3	-1.8	4.4	*

Notes: M Men; F Women; BC British Columbia; PR Prairies; ON Ontario; QC Québec; AC Atlantic; * group difference significant at $p < .05$; + significantly higher than national estimate; - significantly lower than national estimate; (12m) past 12 month use; (30d) past 30 day use; AUDIT Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test

The Prevalence of Alcohol and Other Drug Use

- Alcohol was used by 85.7% and 77.1% of students during the past year and past 30 days, respectively. About one in ten (9.9%) were lifetime abstainers.
- Past year drinking varied by year of study (from 82.3% of first year students to 88.9% of fourth-year students), living situation (from 83.5% among those living off campus with family to 88.1% among those living off campus without family), and region (being above average (85.7% nationally) among those attending university in the Atlantic (90.9%) and in Québec (89.7%) and below the national average in British Columbia (78.5%) and Ontario (84.2%)).
- By far, the most commonly used illicit drug was cannabis, used by 51.4% of students during their lifetime, 32.1% during the past 12 months, and 16.7% during the 30 days before the survey.
- Past year cannabis use varied by gender (34.5% of men vs 30.1% of women), living situation (26.9% among those living off campus with family versus 36.2% those living on campus and 35.5% of those living off campus without family), region (with use being above average (32.1% nationally) among those attending university in Québec (39.0%) and in the Atlantic (36.9%), and below the national average among those attending in the Prairies (19.4%)).
- Following cannabis, the most commonly used illicit drugs were hallucinogens such as magic mushrooms, mescaline and PCP ((reported by 16.9% and 5.6%), during the respondents lifetime and past year) and opiates (reported 13.7%, 5.0%, and 1.0%, during the respondents lifetime, past year and past month).
- The past year use of any illicit drugs other than cannabis was significantly associated with living situation (11.2% among those residing off campus without family vs 7.6 among those living on campus and 6.6% among those living off campus with family) region (Students attending university in Québec reported above average past year use (11.5% vs 8.7% nationally). In addition, those attending university in British Columbia reported above average 30-day use (3.3% vs 2.2% nationally), and those attending in the Prairies reported below average 12-month use (4.5% vs 8.7% nationally).

Drinking Patterns

- Undergraduates display diverse drinking patterns. Two drinking types represent more than half of students: light-infrequent drinking (indicated by the usual consumption of less than 5 drinks daily and less than weekly drinking) reported by 35.8% and light-frequent drinking (indicated by the usual consumption of less than 5 drinks daily and weekly drinking) reported by 22.1%.
- Almost one-third of students reported a heavy pattern drinking, including 16.1% who reported heavy-frequent drinking (indicated by the usual consumption of more than 5 drinks daily and weekly drinking) and 11.7% who reported heavy-infrequent drinking (indicated by the usual consumption of more than 5 drinks daily and less than weekly drinking).
- Type of drinking varies according to region, gender, and year of study. In the Atlantic provinces, heavy-infrequent and heavy-frequent drinking was significantly higher than the Canadian average (22.5% vs 11.7% and 24.5% vs 16.1%, respectively) whereas in Québec these rates were significantly lower (6.2% vs 11.7% and 9.6% vs 16.1%, respectively). Furthermore, compared to women, men were more likely to be frequent drinkers – both heavy-frequent drinkers (12.5% vs 20.6%) and light-frequent drinkers (20.8% vs 23.8%).

- The usual drinking pattern of undergraduates was significantly related to their living arrangements. Heavy-frequent drinking was significantly higher among those living on campus (24.1%) compared to 16.8% among those living off campus on their own, and 12.0% among those living with family.
- Overall, 18.5% and 6.6% of the undergraduates reported consuming 5 or more and 8 or more drinks on a single occasion, once every two weeks or more frequently. Men were more likely to report these drinking patterns than were females. Students in the Atlantic region were more likely, and students in Quebec were less likely, to report these drinking patterns than were their counterparts in the other regions of Canada. Students living on campus were 2.1 times more likely to report heavy episodic drinking compared to students living with family.
- Past month drinkers reported consuming alcohol on average 1.3 times a week, for an average weekly volume of 6.4 drinks. Four of ten drinkers (41.1%) consumed 5+ drinks on one single occasion at least twice over this period, and 17.3% had 8+ drinks at least twice.
- Compared to women, men reported drinking significantly more often (1 time per week vs 1.7 times, respectively), as well as a higher amount (4.5 vs 8.9 drinks a week). Men were also more likely than women to report episodic heavy drinking as indicated by having 5+ or 8+ drinks at least twice during the past month (49.9% vs 34.2% and 25.9% vs 10.6%, respectively).
- The most notable regional differences concern episodic heavy drinking. The proportions of past month drinkers reporting 5+ and 8+ drinks at least twice over the period were significantly lower in Québec (34.3% and 11.2%, respectively) and higher in the Atlantic provinces (49% and 24.4%, respectively,) and in Ontario (45.4% and 20.3%, respectively).
- Students' drinking was significantly related to their living arrangement. Compared to students living with family, students living on campus or off campus without family drink more often and more heavily.
- There is a wide variability in alcohol intake based on the context of drinking. Most drinking occurred mainly on weekends (3 out of four occurrences), and off-campus (86% of drinking occurrences). Students drink in bars and clubs on roughly one occasion out of three (35.5%). Nevertheless, most of the drinking occurrences take place on private premises, with over 40% of the drinking occurrences taking place in someone's home, and 7.2% in university housing (residences or fraternity houses).
- The average alcohol intake is highest when students drink during parties (6.0 drinks), and in bars (5.1 drinks) or university housing (5.7 drinks). The larger the group, the higher is the average alcohol intake (from 1.8 drinks alone to 6.2 drinks in large groups).

Hazardous and Harmful Drinking

- 32.0% of undergraduates reported hazardous or harmful patterns of drinking according to the World Health Organization's Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) screener. This rate was significantly higher among men (37.6%), those living on campus (42.7%) or living off-campus without family (34.1%) and those attending university in the Atlantic (46.5%). Rates of hazardous or harmful drinking were significantly lower among students attending university in British Columbia (26.7%) or Québec (26.6%).
- 43.9% of undergraduates reported at least one indicator of harmful drinking such as feeling guilty, experiencing memory loss or an injury, and having other's concerned about their drinking.

- 31.6% of undergraduates reported at least one indicator of dependent drinking such as being unable to stop, failing to perform normal everyday activities or needing a drink first thing in the morning.
- The most commonly reported harms experienced by students since the beginning of the school year were experiencing a hangover (53.4%), memory loss (25.4%), regrets (24.5%) and missing classes due to a hangover (18.8%).
- Hazardous alcohol-related behaviours were reported by students including unplanned sexual relations (14.1%), driving after drinking too much (7.4%), engaging in unsafe sex (6.0%) and driving while drinking (3.8%).
- Secondary alcohol-related harms resulting from other students' drinking included study or sleep interruptions (32.9%), serious arguments or quarrels (17.3%), being pushed or assaulted (10.0%) and experiencing sexual harassment (9.8%).

Mental Health

- About one-third (29.2%) of undergraduates reported four or more symptoms indicative of elevated distress as measured by the 12-item General Health Questionnaire mental health screener.
- Elevated distress was higher among women than men (33.5% vs 23.9%), those attending university in British Columbia or Ontario (30.7% and 32.8% vs 29.2% nationally) and lowest among the recreationally-oriented students (21%) compared to others.
- The most common symptoms of distress were more likely reported by women than men and included feeling constantly under strain (reported by 47% of all students and 53% of women and 41% of men), lost sleep over worry (32%, 38% of women and 25% of men) and feeling unhappy or depressed (31%, 36% women and 28% of men).
- About one in ten (9%) reported both elevated distress and hazardous and harmful drinking as defined by the AUDIT 8+).

Gambling Behaviours and Problems

- 61.5% of undergraduates have bet or spent money on at least one gambling activity since the beginning of the school year. The most commonly reported activities were lotteries (51%), slots and video lotteries (22.7%), casino gambling (19%), cards and dice games (17.7%) and sports betting (10.8%), the latter being particularly a male dominated activity (19.4 of men vs 4.0% of women).
- Based on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index, 7.9% of all students were identified at-risk for developing serious gambling problems, 2.7% with moderate problems and 1.0% with severe problems.
- Although gambling was reported equally by men and women (62.2% of men vs 61.0% of women), male gamblers were more likely than their female counterparts to be at-risk for gambling problems (17.1% of men vs 9.9% of women) and to have moderate and severe problems (7.4% and 3.5% of men vs 2.0% and 0.2% for women).

- Reporting any gambling activity increased with the year of study with significantly more gamblers among third- and fourth-year students (62.9% and 67.9%) compared to first- and second-year students (57.2% and 59.6%). However, senior students who reported gambling were less likely to be gamblers at-risk for problems (12% of third- and fourth-year students vs 15.5% of first-year students) and gamblers with moderate problems (3.6% and 3.4% of third-year and fourth-year students vs 6.1% and 4.4% of first-year students).
- Gambling varied across regions with more students reporting gambling during the past school year in the Atlantic (71.9% vs 61.5% nationally) and the least in British Columbia (56.8%). Students in the Atlantic who reported gambling are more likely to be gamblers at-risk for problems (15.4% vs 13.2% nationally) and gamblers with moderate problems (5.3% vs 4.4% nationally) whereas students in Québec are the least likely to be gamblers at-risk for problems (11.6%) and gamblers with moderate problems (2.1%).

Campus Issues

- In the month before the survey, one-quarter (25.1%) of students (27.3% of men and 23.3% of women) took advantage of low priced promotions at bars on campus. In addition, 14.5% (18.0% of men and 11.8% of women) took advantage of happy hours, 12.2% (16.7% of men and 8.8% of women) took advantage of special promotions by beer companies, and 7.0% (7.5% v 6.6%) took advantage of cover charges of unlimited drinking.
- Attendance at such promotions is associated with heavy drinking. Compared to those who did not report consuming 5+ drinks on a single occasion during the past month, heavy drinkers were more likely to report attending a happy hour (56.0% vs 78.4%); using low-priced promotions (50.5% vs 83.2%); attending beer company promotions (55.3% vs 86.1%) and unlimited cover charges (57.4% vs 84.5%).
- Generally, frequent drinkers find the campus environment conducive to their drinking, and heavy drinkers believe that the alcohol policies on their campus are not enforced.
- About one in 7 students (15.3%) would like to reside in a alcohol-free residence but do not; 3.9% of students currently reside in alcohol-free residences.

Changes between 1998 and 2004

To determine whether there were any changes in alcohol use, other drug use and mental health problems among Canadian undergraduates, the 2004 Canadian Campus Survey was compared to a similar survey conducted in 1998.

- Indicators of alcohol use show no significant change between 1998 and 2004. This includes rates of past year drinking (86.5% [84.0%-88.6% 95%CI] vs 85.7% [83.2%-87.9%]), heavy-frequent drinking (13.1% [10.0%-17.0%] vs 16.1% [13.6%-18.9%]), and hazardous and harmful drinking as measured by the overall AUDIT (30.0% [25.6%-34.9%] vs 32.0 [28.6%-35.6%]).
- In addition, the percentage of students reporting any specific AUDIT harm symptoms (feeling guilty, memory loss, injury concern of others) or one of the three AUDIT dependence symptoms (unable to stop; failed normal activities; morning drink) remained unchanged between 1998 and 2004. The percentage reporting any AUDIT harm was 43.1% [39.4%-46.9% 95%CI] in 1998 compared to

43.9% [41.0%-46.9%] in 2004, while the percentage reporting any AUDIT dependence symptom was 30.4% [27.4%-33.6%] in 1998 compared to 31.6% [29.6%-33.6%] in 2004.

- Cigarette smoking generally declined between 1998 and 2004, from 17.3% [15.2% – 19.7% 95%CI] to 13.3% [11.5% – 15.4%], and significantly so among second year students (19.4% [16.6%-22.7%] to 11.6% [9.0%-14.8%] and among students in the Prairies (from 14.0% [11.9%-16.5%] to 9.4% [8.2%-10.7%]).
- The past year prevalence of hallucinogens such as mescaline and mushrooms, and LSD significantly declined between 1998 and 2004, from 8.2% [7.0%-9.6% 95%CI] to 5.7 [4.6%-6.9%], and from 1.8 [1.3%-2.6%] to less than 1%.
- Among all students the past year use of cannabis remained similar between 1998 and 2004, 28.8% [26.0%-31.6% 95%CI] vs 32.1% [28.7%-35.6%]. However, cannabis use declined among students in the Prairies, from 24.1% [21.3%-27.2%] to 19.4% [18.0%-20.8%] and increased in the Atlantic, from 26.5% [26.5%-26.6%] to 36.9 [29.8%-44.7%].
- The past year use of any 8 illicit drugs excluding cannabis (i.e., cocaine, crack, amphetamines, heroin, LSD, hallucinogens, Ecstasy and party drugs.) remained stable overall between 1998 and 2004 (from 10.3 [9.0%-11.8% 95%CI] to 8.7 [7.3%-10.3%]). However, use of illicit drugs declined significantly among those attending university in the Prairies (from 9.1% [7.4%-11.3%] to 4.5% [3.7%-5.4%]).
- The overall prevalence of elevated psychological distress remained stable between 1998 and 2004 29.8% [28.1%-31.5% 95%CI] to 29.2% [27.0%-31.5%], and also remained stable among subgroups.