

Ontario High School Students' Perceptions about Drugs at School

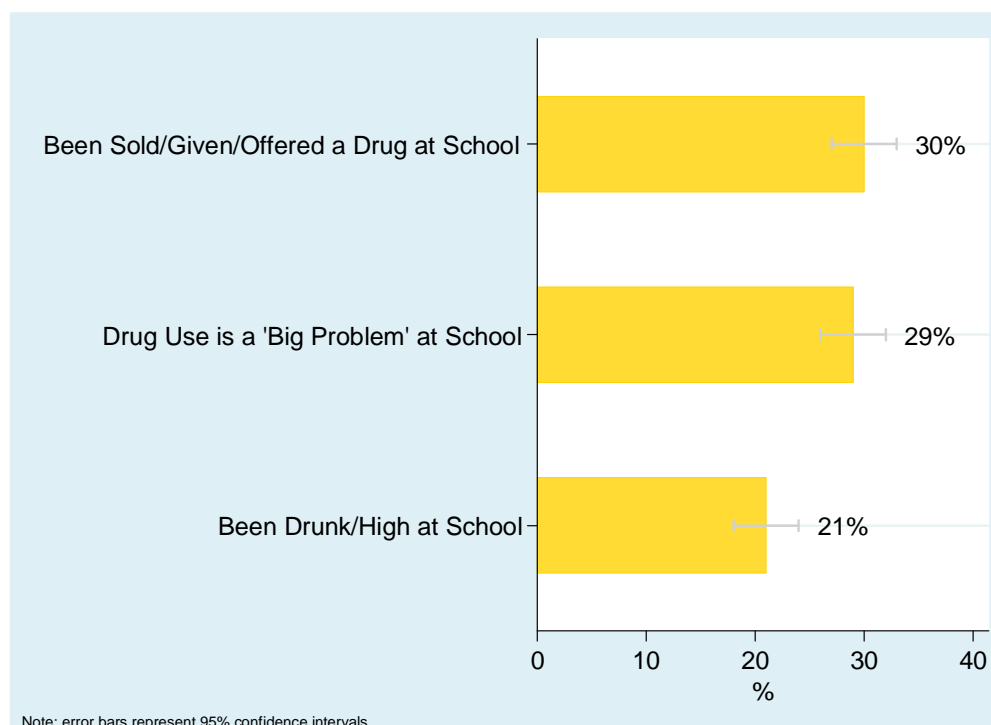
This *eBulletin* looks at perceptions and behaviours surrounding drugs at school among high school students (grades 9 to 12) in Ontario, and trends over recent years. The data are from the 2009 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS). The OSDUHS is a repeated cross-sectional anonymous survey of Ontario students in grades 7 to 12, and is the longest ongoing school survey in Canada and the second-longest in North America.

Are Drugs Available in Schools?

Students were asked if anyone had tried to sell them a drug or give them an illegal drug on school property.

As seen in Figure 1, 30% (95% CI: 27%-33%) of students in grades 9 to 12 reported that someone had sold, given or offered them a drug at school at least once during the past year. There were no statistically significant differences among the four regions of the province, as students in Northern Ontario, Eastern Ontario, Western Ontario, and Toronto were equally likely to report this occurrence. Also, there was no significant difference between students living in rural versus urban/suburban areas. The percentage of Ontario high schools students who reported drug availability at school has not significantly changed since this question was first included in the survey in 2005.

Figure 1.
Perceptions and Behaviours about Drugs at School among Ontario High School Students (Grades 9-12), 2009 OSDUHS



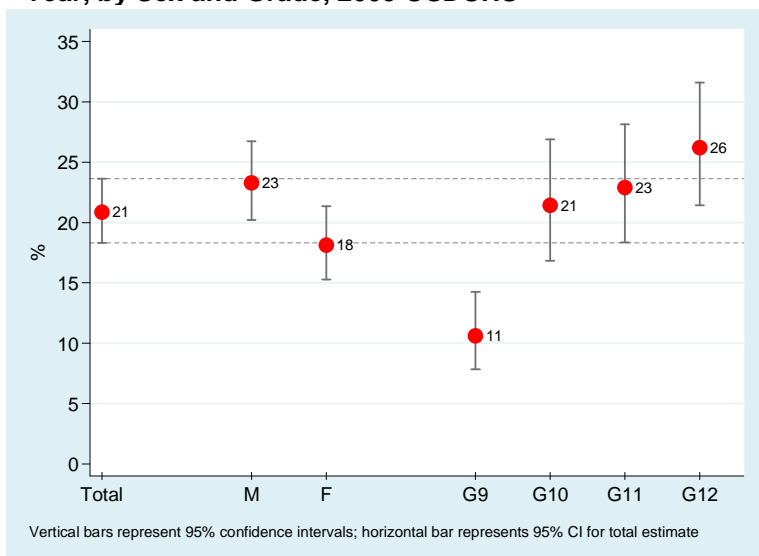
Is Drug Use Perceived to be a “Big Problem” in Schools?

Among Ontario students in grades 9 to 12, 29% (95% CI: 26%-32%) felt that drug use at their school was a “big problem.” There was no statistically significant difference according to region, nor did beliefs differ between students in rural versus urban/suburban areas of the province. Looking at trends over time, the percentage of Ontario high school students who felt that drug use at their school was a “big problem” has not significantly changed since 1999, when this question was first asked.

Intoxication at School

About one-fifth (21%; 95% CI: 18%-24%) of high school students reported that they had been either drunk or high at school at least once during the past year (Figure 2). Males were more likely than females to report this behaviour (23% vs. 18%, respectively). There was a significant grade effect (e.g., one-quarter of 12th-graders reported being intoxicated at school at least once in the past year). Again, there were no significant differences according to region of the province, or rural versus urban/suburban areas. Looking at trends over time, the percentage of students who reported being intoxicated at school has not significantly changed since this question was first included in the survey in 2005.

Figure 2.
Percentage of High School Students Who Reported Being Intoxicated at School at Least Once in the Past Year, by Sex and Grade, 2009 OSDUHS



Methods:

CAMH'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 to 12. The survey has been conducted every two years since 1977 with the purpose of monitoring substance use, perceptions about substance use, mental health, physical health, and risk behaviours among students. The 2009 survey, which used a stratified (region, school type) two-stage (school, class) cluster design was based on 9,112 students in grades 7 to 12 from 47 public and Catholic school boards, 181 schools, and 573 classes. Self-administered questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University on a classroom basis between November 2008 and June 2009. The student participation rate was 65%. All survey estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design. The margin of error is $\pm 2\%$. The findings presented here are based on 2,728 students in grades 9 to 12 in public and Catholic schools.

Measures & Terminology:

- **Drug availability at school** was measured with the question: “In the last 12 months, has anyone offered, sold, or given you an illegal drug on school property?”
- **Perception of a drug problem at school** was assessed with the question: “In your school, is drug use a big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all?”
- **Intoxication at school** was measured with the question: “In the last 12 months, how many times (if ever) have you been drunk or high on school property?”
- **Region:** the survey design divides the province into four regions: Toronto; Northern Ontario (Parry Sound District, Nipissing District and farther north); Western Ontario (Peel District, Dufferin County and farther west); and Eastern Ontario (Simcoe County, York County and farther east).
- **95% confidence interval (CI)** can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the “true” value if every student in grade 9 to grade 12 in Ontario was surveyed.
- **Statistically 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:

Paglia-Boak, A., Mann, R.E., Adlaf, E.M., & Rehm, J. (2009). *Drug use among Ontario students, 1977-2009: Detailed OSDUHS findings* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 27). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [Available online at <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>]

Suggested Citation:

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2010, March). Ontario High School Students' Perceptions about Drugs at School. *CAMH Population Studies eBulletin*, 11(1). Toronto, Ontario: CAMH. Retrieved from http://www.camh.net/research/areas_of_research/population_life_course_studies/eBulletins/research_population_ebulletins.html

To receive future issues of the *eBulletin*, please contact Christine Vrbanac at: christine_vrbanac@camh.net

For information on CAMH population health surveys please visit: http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html

Media Enquiries: Tel: 416-595-6015