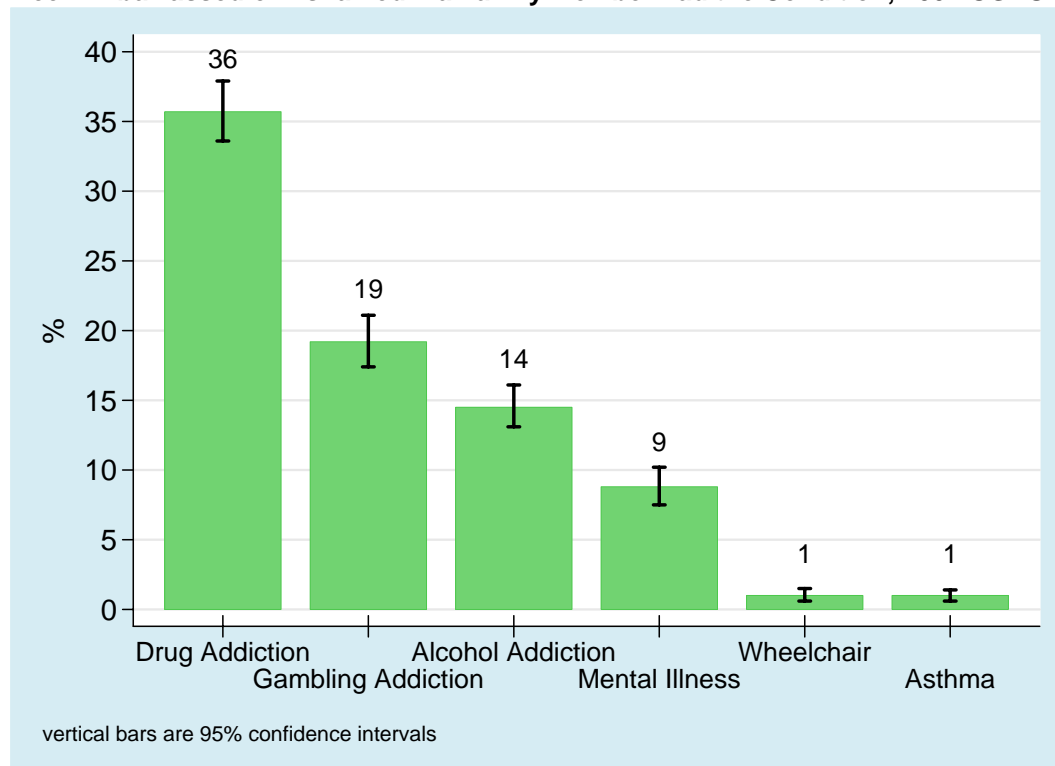


Students' Perceptions of Shame Associated with Addiction, Gambling, and Mental Illness

This *eBulletin* presents students' perceptions of shame associated with six health problems or conditions. Data are from the 2007 cycle of the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS), which is an anonymous in-class survey of 7th- to 12th-graders conducted every two years in Ontario schools. Students were asked to indicate, hypothetically, how embarrassed or ashamed they would be if their friends discovered that someone in their family: (1) was addicted to alcohol, (2) was addicted to drugs, (3) was addicted to gambling, (4) had a mental illness, (5) was in a wheelchair, and (6) had asthma. The latter two were included only to serve as control conditions.

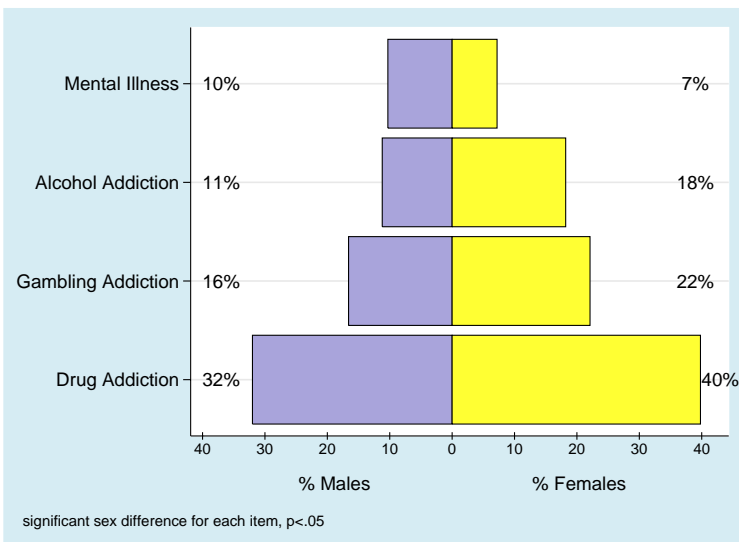
Figure 1 shows the percentage of students reporting they would "definitely" be embarrassed or ashamed if a family member had the given condition. Among the conditions, students perceive a family member with a drug addiction as most shameful, with 36% (95% CI: 34%-38%) reporting that they definitely would be embarrassed or ashamed, followed by a family member with a gambling addiction (19%, 95% CI: 17%-21%), alcohol addiction (14%, 95% CI: 13%-16%) and mental illness (9%, 95% CI: 8%-10%). As expected, relatively very few students perceive the need for a wheelchair, or having asthma as shameful.

Figure 1.
Percentage of Students in Grades 7 to 12 (N=2,935) Reporting They Would "Definitely" Feel Embarrassed or Ashamed if a Family Member had the Condition, 2007 OSDUHS



Further analysis by sex shows that females are significantly more likely than males to perceive drug, alcohol, and gambling addiction as shameful. Males, on the other hand, are significantly more likely to perceive a mental illness as shameful (see Figure 2). There are few differences among the grade levels, as only two conditions show a significant effect (data not presented). Compared to the other grades, students in grade 8 are most likely to perceive alcohol addiction (20%) and mental illness (13%) as shameful.

Figure 2.
Percentage of Students Reporting They Would “Definitely” Feel Embarrassed or Ashamed if a Family Member had the Condition, by Sex, 2007 OSDUHS



Methods:

The *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS)* 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 survey uses a stratified (region, school type) two-stage cluster design (school, class). The 2007 total sample size was 6,323 students in grades 7 to 12 from 43 school boards, 119 schools, and 385 classes. The student participation rate was 68%. The 2007 sample represents about 1,011,000 students in grades 7 to 12 in public and Catholic schools across the province. Self-administered questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University on a classroom basis between November 2006 and June 2007. The present analysis is based on a random-half sample of 2,935 students. All estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design.

Terminology:

- Each of the six **perceptions of shame** was measured with the following question: “Would you feel embarrassed or ashamed if your friends knew that someone if your family had [condition]”? The response options were: definitely, probably, probably not, definitely not, and not sure. The questions about “a mental illness” and “asthma” had an extra response option of “don’t know what [condition] is”, and these cases were excluded from the analysis.
- **95% Confidence Interval (CI)** can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the “true” value if every student in grades 7 to 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:

These findings are based on unpublished analyses. Please see the following reports for more *OSDUHS* findings:

Adlaf, E.M. & Paglia-Boak, A. (2007). *Drug Use Among Ontario Students, 1977-2007: Detailed OSDUHS Findings*. CAMH Research Document Series, No. 20. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (The report is available in PDF format at <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>.)

Adlaf, E.M. & Paglia-Boak, A, Beitchman, J.H., & Wolfe, D. (2008). *The Mental health and Well-Being of Ontario Students, 1991-2007: Detailed OSDUHS Findings*. CAMH Research Document Series, No. 22. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (The report is available in PDF format at <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>.)

Suggested Citation:

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Students’ Perceptions of Shame Associated with Addiction, Gambling, and Mental Illness. *CAMH Population Studies eBulletin*, July/August 2008, Vol. 9, No. 4. Toronto, Ontario: CAMH.

To receive future issues of the *eBulletin*, please contact Christine Vrbanc via email at: christine_vrbanc@camh.net

Previous issues of the *eBulletin* can be found at: http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html

Media Enquiries: Tel: 416-595-6015