

More Canadian Students Drink, but American Students Drink More Heavily: Comparing Alcohol Use in Canada and the U.S.

December 16, 2002 (Toronto) For Immediate Release: More Canadian students drink alcohol but American students drink more according to the first comparison of national alcohol studies among university/college students published this month in the journal *Addiction*.

"The good news for Canada is that while there are more students drinking here, there is not as much heavy use of alcohol, which has very significant health risks," said Dr. Ed Adlaf, Research Scientist, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), and associate professor with the Department of Public Health Science at the University of Toronto, one of the authors of the study.

The present study compares two national surveys, the 1998 Canadian Campus Survey conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the 1999 College Alcohol Study (CAS) conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health. The self-report surveys were conducted with 16 nationally representative four-year universities in Canada and 119 nationally representative US four-year colleges and universities in 40 states.

More Canadian students than US students (92% versus 86%) reported having drunk at some point in their life and in the past year (87% vs. 81%). Among those students who drink, however, heavy drinking, defined as five or more drinks in a row for males/four or more for females, was found to be more prevalent among US than Canadian students. The differences increased among past-year drinkers (41% vs. 35%) and past-week drinkers (54% vs. 42%).

In both countries, older students and students living at home with their parents are less likely to be heavy drinkers; students who report first drunkenness before the age of 16 are more likely to be heavy drinkers in college. These results led the authors to suggest that programs aimed at students' heavy alcohol use should target first year students at entry or earlier.

"Our results provide new insight to the potential cross-national differences on important issues, like the gender gap in drinking, and the protective role parents may play. These findings could be used to advance research on heavy drinking in campuses across North America," said Dr. Henry Wechsler, principal investigator of the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health is Canada's largest mental health and addiction facility fully affiliated with the University of Toronto. CAMH is a PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre. Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.