



Overview of Binge Drinking in Ontario: Part I

Heavy episodic drinking, commonly referred to as “binge” drinking, is defined as having five or more drinks on one occasion. This pattern of drinking warrants attention because of the potential harmful consequences such as injury, driving while intoxicated, and violence.^{1,2}

The data presented here come from three surveys: (1) the 2001 *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*, which surveyed students in grades 7 to OAC; (2) the 1998 *Canadian Campus Survey (CCS)*, which surveyed undergraduate university students; and (3) the 2001 *CAMH Monitor (CM)*, which surveyed Ontario adults in the general population. Because the measures of binge drinking differ slightly across the three samples, direct comparisons are limited. Still, these data are useful for providing a population overview of binge drinking.

Prevalence of Binge Drinking

In 2001, over one-quarter (27.5%) of Ontario students in grades 7 to OAC reported binge drinking at least once during the 4 weeks before the survey. Among university students aged 19-24 years, 72.1% binged at least once in the 12 months before the 1998 survey, as did the same percentage (72.9%) of their general-population counterparts in 2001. Those in aged 25-34 in the university sample and the general population had similar rates of binge drinking, with both hovering around 61%-64%.

Not surprisingly, adults aged 35 and older are less likely to binge drink compared to younger age groups. Half (49.7%) of those aged 35-49 years and less than one-third (29.6%) of people 50 and older reported binge drinking at least once in the past year.

Table 1. Percentage Reporting Binge Drinking, by Age Group.

| | Students | University Students* | Adults (Household) |
|-----------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Age Group | 2001 <i>OSDUS</i> (N=4,211) | 1998 <i>CCS</i> (N=975) | 2001 <i>CM</i> (N=2,546) |
| 11-18 | 27.5 (25.0, 30.2) | -- | -- |
| 19-24 | -- | 72.1 (42.6, 90.0) | 72.9 (66.0, 78.9) |
| 25-34 | -- | 61.3 (29.0, 86.0) | 63.8 (58.4, 68.9) |
| 35-49 | -- | -- | 49.7 (45.9, 53.5) |
| 50+ | -- | -- | 29.6 (26.3, 33.1) |

Notes: (1) The 95% confidence intervals for percentages are shown in brackets. (2) For *OSDUS*, binge drinking is defined as having 5+ drinks on one occasion at least once in the past 4 weeks. For the *CCS* and the *CM*, it is defined as having 5+ drinks on one occasion at least once in the past 12 months.

* Ontario universities only

Frequency of Binge Drinking

Among all students surveyed in the *OSDUS*, 6.2% report binge drinking at least 4 times during the 4 weeks before the survey.

About 6% Ontario university students between the ages 19 and 34 report binge drinking at least 50 times during the past 12 months.

Among adults surveyed in the *CM*, 12.2% report binge drinking once a week or more often during the past 12 months. Over one-quarter (28%) reported this pattern once a month or more often.

In each survey, males were significantly more likely to binge drink and to do so more frequently than females.

Methods:

The *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)* is an ongoing Ontario-wide survey of elementary (grades 7 and 8) and high school (grades 9-OAC) students conducted every two years since 1977. The 2001 survey, which used a stratified (region) two-stage cluster design (school, class) included 4,211 students in grades 7 to OAC from 41 school boards, 106 schools, and 272 classes. Self-administered questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University on a classroom basis between February and June 2001.

The 1998 *Canadian Campus Survey (CCS)* surveyed 7800 undergraduate students from 16 universities across Canada. This anonymous mail survey employed a stratified (region) two-stage cluster (university, student) design. For this eBulletin, only Ontario universities (N=3) were selected. Data are based on 975 students, age range from 19 to 34 years.

The *CAMH Monitor (CM)* is an addiction and mental health random, anonymous telephone survey of the Ontario population aged 18 and older, administered by the Institute for Social Research. The *CM* is an ongoing monthly survey, based on a regionally stratified design. The 2001 data is based on 12 survey cycles from January to December 2001. Analyses were limited to ages 19 and older (N=2,546)

All survey estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design.

Terminology:

- **Binge Drinking.** For the *OSDUS*, this was measured with the question "How many times in the last four weeks have you had five or more drinks of alcohol on the same occasion?" For the *CM*, this was measured with "About how often during the past 12 months would you say you had five or more drinks at the same sitting or occasion?" For the *CCS*, this was measured by summing the number of times in the past 12 months that students reported drinking: (1) between 5 and 7 drinks on one occasion; (2) between 8 and 11 drinks; and (3) 12 or more drinks. Prevalence is defined as drinking 5 or more drinks on one occasion at least once in the stated time period.
- **95% Confidence Interval** The 95% confidence interval can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the "true" percentage value.
- **Significant Difference:** refers to a difference between two percentage values 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.

Sources:

Findings from the 1998 *CCS* and the 2001 *CM* are based on unpublished data analyses.

Adlaf, E.M., & Paglia, A. (2001). *Drug Use Among Ontario Students: Findings from the OSDUS, 1977-2001*. CAMH Research Document Series No. 10. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

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References:

1. Edwards, G. *et al.* (1994). *Alcohol policy and the public good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Holder, H. D., & Edwards, G. (Eds.). (1995). *Alcohol and public policy: Evidence and issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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