



Students' Exposure to Illicit Drugs in Ontario

Several types of indicators can be used to describe the nature of drug use in a given population. One is actual use – i.e., the percentage that report using a drug. Other indicators describe the environment – factors such as drug availability, access, and exposure.

This *eBulletin* discusses drug availability and exposure to drug selling. The data used come from the 2001 *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*, which surveyed students in grades 7 to 13 (OAC) across the province.

How Easy is it to Get Drugs?

In 2001, students across Ontario were asked how easy it would be to get cannabis, cocaine, LSD, and ecstasy (MDMA) if they wanted to do so. Not surprisingly, cannabis is the most readily available drug, with over half (55.2%) of students in grades 7 to 13 indicating that it is easy or very easy to obtain (see Table 1). Just over one-quarter (28.3%) of students report that ecstasy is easy to obtain. Cocaine and LSD are both slightly more difficult to obtain, with about one-fifth reporting ease. Generally, drugs become more readily available with increasing grade.

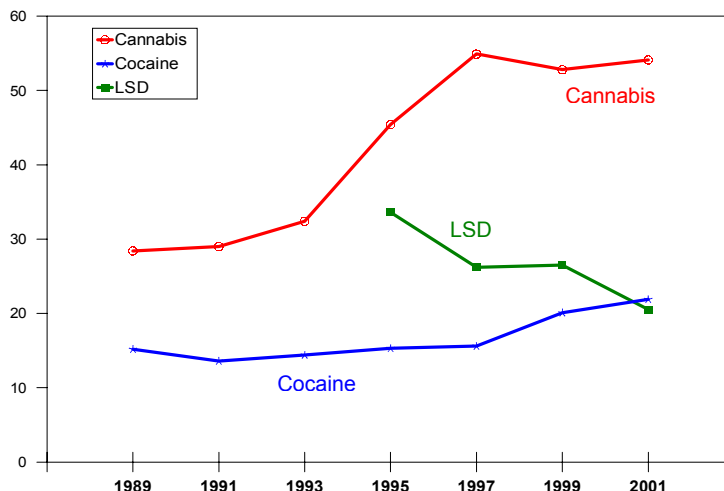
The *OSDUS* has tracked the perceived availability of cannabis and cocaine since 1989, and of LSD since 1995. As seen in Figure 1, the availability of cannabis has significantly increased over the past decade, from 28% in 1989 to 54% in 2001 (among grades 7, 9, 11, 13 only). The perceived availability of cocaine has increased incrementally since 1989 (from 15% to 22% in 2001), whereas that of LSD has significantly decreased since 1995 (from 34% to 20% to 2001).

Table 1. Percentage of Students Reporting the Drug is “Easy” or “Very Easy” to Obtain, by Grade, OSDUS 2001

	Drug			
	Cannabis	Cocaine	LSD	Ecstasy
N=	1968	1968	2243	1968
Total	55.2	21.7	20.8	28.3
(95% CI)	(52.1-58.3)	(19.7-23.8)	(18.2-23.7)	(25.6-31.1)
Grade				
7	14.9	6.9	5.2	3.9
8	27.6	9.2	7.1	12.2
9	59.5	26.3	21.3	28.7
10	68.6	24.4	24.9	37.4
11	76.6	31.4	30.6	36.8
12	73.6	32.5	34.3	46.0
13	78.6	22.6	30.0	43.8

Note: Each drug question was asked of a random half sample.

Figure 1. Percentage Reporting the Drug is “Easy” or “Very Easy” to Obtain, OSDUS 1989 – 2001 (Grades 7, 9, 11, & 13)



Note: LSD was first asked about in 1995; ecstasy was not asked about until 2001.

Exposure to Drug Selling

The 2001 *OSDUS* asked students whether anyone had tried to sell them drugs during the 12 months before the survey, and whether they had witnessed drug selling in their neighbourhood. As seen in Table 2, over one-third (39%) of students indicated that someone tried to sell them drugs, and 32.2% witnessed drug selling in their neighbourhood. Exposure to drug selling significantly differs by grade, with a peak seen among students in grades 10 and 11.

Although there is variation by region of the province, these differences are not statistically significant, suggesting that there is no one region in which drug selling is a greater problem.

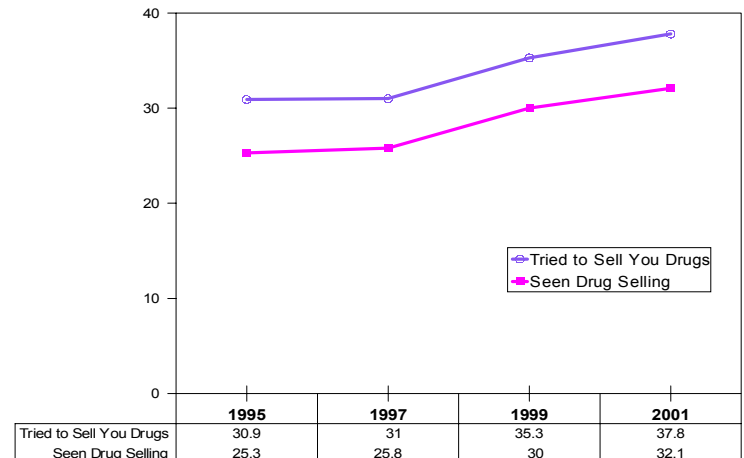
Table 2. Percentage Reporting that Someone Tried to Sell them Drugs, and Witnessing Drug Selling in the Neighbourhood in the Past 12 Months, by Grade and by Region of the Province, *OSDUS* 2001 (Grades 7 to 13)

	<i>Someone Tried to Sell You Drugs</i> (% yes)	<i>Seen Drug Selling in the Neighbourhood</i> (% yes)
Total N= 1968 (95% CI)	39.0 (35.5-42.5)	32.2 (29.2-35.3)
Grade		
7	13.1	14.2
8	20.2	17.8
9	46.6	36.6
10	53.7	40.0
11	50.8	44.0
12	42.0	36.7
13	40.5	33.3
Toronto	29.4	30.6
North	35.0	26.0
West	43.4	33.1
East	39.6	33.4

Note: Each question was asked of a random half sample.

The *OSDUS* provides trend data on these two questions, spanning back to 1995 (see Figure 2). Both indicators of drug selling exposure have significantly increased between 1995 and 2001, among grades 7, 9, 11, and 13.

Figure 2. Percentage Reporting that Someone Tried to Sell them Drugs, and Witnessing Drug Selling in the Neighbourhood in the Past 12 Months, *OSDUS* 1995 – 2001 (Grades 7, 9, 11, & 13)



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.

All survey estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design. The questions presented here were asked of random half samples.

Note that prior to the 1999 survey, only students in grades 7, 9, 11, and 13 (OAC) were included. Therefore, trend data comparisons are limited to these four grades.

Terminology:

- **Drug Availability** was measured with the question “How easy or difficult would it be for you to get [*drug*] if you wanted some?” Response options were “impossible,” “very difficult,” “difficult,” “easy,” “very easy,” or “don’t know.”
- **Exposure to Drug Selling** was gauged with 2 questions: (1) “In the last 12 months, have you seen anyone selling drugs in your neighbourhood?”; and (2) In the last 12 months, has anyone tried to sell you drugs?”
- **Region:** For the survey, Ontario was divided into 4 regions using the following boundaries: *Toronto* (schools within the amalgamated Toronto); *North* (schools within the North Bay and Sudbury areas and farther north); *West* (schools within Peel Region and farther west); and *East* (schools within York Region and farther east).
- **95% Confidence Interval** can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the “true” percentage value if every student in Ontario was surveyed.
- **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:

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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