
The Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students: Findings from the OSDUS 1991-2001 – Report Highlights

Family and School Life:

- A majority (73%) of Ontario students live with both natural parents; about one-in-six (16%) live with a single parent.
- A majority of students (over 85%) report a positive school climate – that is, they feel connected to their school. Still, one-in-eight (12%) are worried about being harmed or threatened at school.

Physical Health:

- Although a majority (60%) of students rate their health as excellent or very good, one-in-ten (10%) report poor or fair health.
- 14% reported no physical activity during the past 7 days.
- Over one-third (36%) do not meet the current health recommendation of engaging in at least 20 minutes of vigorous activity at least 3 times weekly.

Mental Health:

- Over one-quarter (28%) of students report an elevated level of psychological distress.
- One-in-ten (11%) had seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months.
- One-in-ten (11%) report visiting a mental health professional during the past 12 months.
- About one-in-ten (9%) students report low self-esteem.
- 6% are bullied at school on a daily or weekly basis.
- About one-in-twenty (5%) students are at high risk for depression.

Violence and Delinquent Activity:

- One-in-six (16%) students were in a physical fight at school in the past 12 months.
- One-in-eight (12%) students report assaulting someone during the past 12 months.
- One-in-ten (10%) report carrying a weapon (e.g., knife or gun).
- 7% bully other students on a daily or weekly basis.
- 6% participated in 4 or more gambling activities in the past 12 months.
- 5% report gang fighting.
- 3% report symptoms of pathological gambling.

Coexisting Problems:

- About 4% of Ontario students report both psychological distress *and* drinking hazardingly.

Important Demographic Differences:

- Females are significantly more likely than males to:
 - be at high risk for depression
 - have elevated psychological distress
 - seriously consider suicide
 - visit a mental health professional
 - feel that they are overweight.
- Males are significantly more likely than females to:
 - engage in violent and delinquent activities
 - be bullying victims, and to bully others
 - gamble at 4 or more activities
 - show signs of pathological gambling.

- The following indicators typically increase with grade:
 - elevated psychological distress
 - coexisting psychological distress *and* drinking hazardingly
 - non-violent delinquent activity
 - gambling at 4 or more activities, and signs of pathological gambling.
- The following tend to decrease with grade:
 - physical fighting at school
 - bullying other students, and being bullied.

Some Changes Over Time:

- Among the total sample, there were no significant changes between 1999 and 2001 in reports of low self-esteem, psychological distress, or high risk for depression. However, females showed improvements in self-esteem and psychological distress between these two years.
- Weapon carrying has been steadily declining since 1993 (15% vs 9% in 2001), and is currently at its lowest point on record. Reports of assaulting someone peaked in 1997 (20%) and declined to 11% in 2001. Gang fighting remained stable over the past decade.
- Reports of pathological gambling declined among all students between 1999 and 2001 (6% vs 3%). However, pathological gambling increased among 13th-graders (2% in 1999 vs 6% in 2001).
- In 2001, a greater proportion of students reported selling cannabis than did students in 1991 (8% vs 3%, respectively).

Methods:

Findings are based on the *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*, which 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 estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the complex sampling design.

Terminology:

- **Low Self-Esteem** is defined as responding negatively to at least 3 out of 6 items adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.
- **High Risk for Depression** is defined as “usually” or “often” experiencing all 4 symptoms from the CES-D (past 7 days time frame).
- **Elevated Psychological Distress** is measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), which is a 12-item screening instrument used to assess current mental health problems in surveys. The items assess the recent frequency of experiencing 12 symptoms (e.g., stress, depression, problem making decisions). Distress is defined as experiencing at least 3 of the 12 GHQ symptoms.
- **Hazardous Drinking** is measured by the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), which is a 10-item instrument designed to detect a drinking problem at the less severe end of the spectrum. The percentage reported here is based on a score of at least 11 out of 40.
- **Pathological Gambling Problem** is measured by the South Oaks Gambling Screen Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA), and is defined as experiencing 4 or more of the 12 symptoms during the past 12 months.
- **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.

Source:

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