



Overview of Binge Drinking in Ontario: Part II

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} This *eBulletin* describes trends in this drinking pattern over the past two decades.

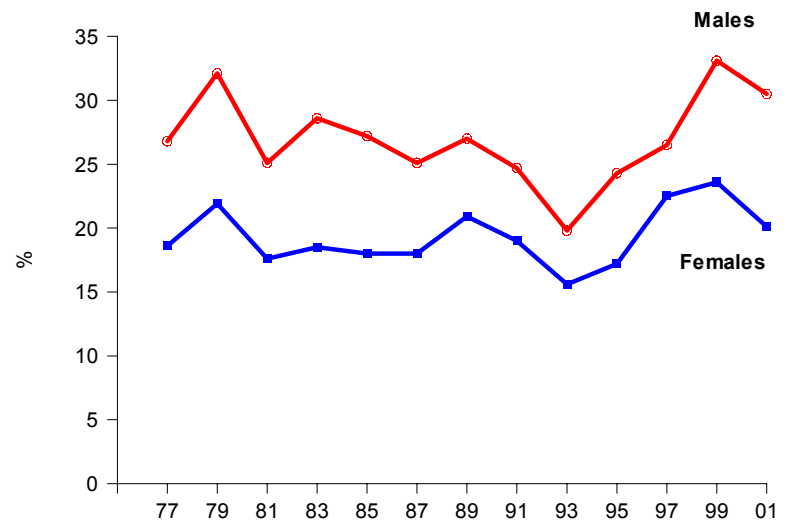
The data presented here come from two on-going surveys: (1) the *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*, which surveys students in elementary and secondary schools; and (2) the *CAMH Monitor (CM)*, which surveys Ontario adults aged 18 and older in the general population. Because the measures of binge drinking differ between the two surveys, direct comparisons between students and adults cannot be made. Still, these data are useful for providing a population overview of changes in binge drinking over time.

Student Trends: 1977-2001

The *OSDUS* asked students if they had consumed five or more drinks on a single occasion during the 4 weeks before the survey. In 2001, 25% of students in grades 7, 9, 11, and OAC reported consuming this amount at least once (30% of males, 20% of females).

As seen in Figure 1, binge drinking generally declined among students between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. However, there was a significant increase over the 1990s among both males and females, from a low of 18% (both sexes) in 1993 climbing to an all-time high of 28% in 1999. Between 1999 and 2001, binge drinking among students showed a non-significant decrease.

Figure 1. Percentage of Students in Grades 7, 9, 11, OAC Reporting Binge Drinking at Least Once in the Past 4 Weeks, by Sex, OSDUS 1977-2001



Adult Trends: 1977-2001

Adults were asked how often they had consumed five or more drinks on a single occasion during the 12 months before the survey. In 2001, 12% reported consuming this amount at least weekly (21% of males, 4% of females).

Figure 2 presents trends in weekly binge drinking for both sexes since 1977. Generally, between 1977 and 1995, rates were stable, hovering under 10%. However, since 1995, binge drinking has significantly increased in the adult population, especially among males (11% in 1995 to 21% in 2001).

Since 1995, binge drinking has increased among adults in all age groups (see Figure 3), but these increases were especially prominent among 18-29 year-olds (11% in 1995 to 18% in 2001), as well as 50-64 year-olds (4% to 12%).

Figure 2. Percentage of Adults Aged 18+ Reporting Binge Drinking on a Weekly Basis During the Past 12 Months, by Sex, CM 1977-2001

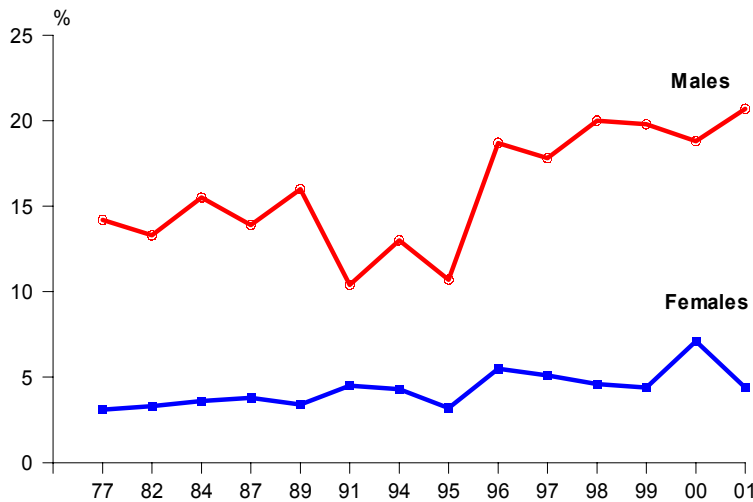
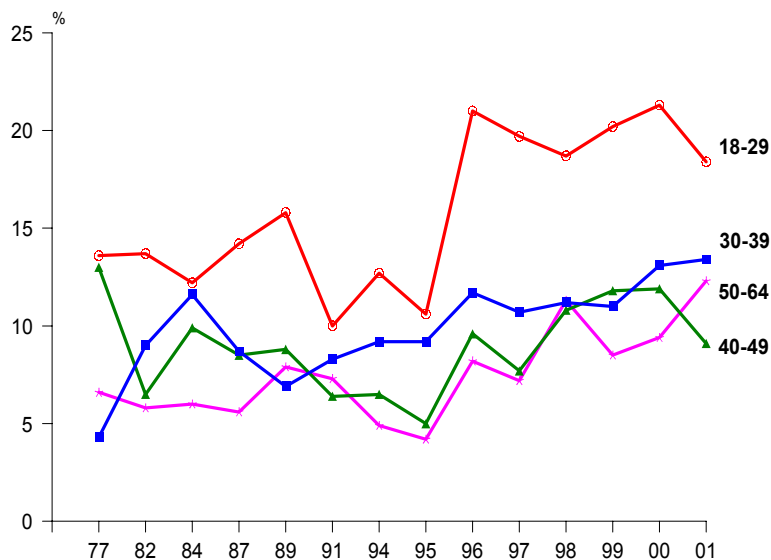


Figure 3. Percentage of Adults Aged 18+ Reporting Binge Drinking on a Weekly Basis During the Past 12 Months, by Age Group,* CM 1977-2001



* Adults aged 65 and older are not shown.

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.

It is important to note that prior to 1999, the *OSDUS* surveyed students in grades 7, 9, 11, and OAC only. For this reason, our trend analysis is limited to these four grades

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 (N=2,627).

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

Terminology:

- Binge Drinking:** In the *OSDUS*, this was measured with the question "How many times in the last 4 weeks have you had five or more drinks of alcohol on the same occasion?" Prevalence was defined as having consumed this amount at least once in the past 4 weeks.
 In the *CM*, binge drinking 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?" Prevalence was defined as consuming this amount on a weekly or daily basis in 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.

Sources:

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

Adlaf, E.M., & Ialomiteanu, A. (2001). *CAMH Monitor eReport: Addiction and Mental Health Indicators Among Ontario Adults, 1977-2000*. CAMH Research Document Series No. 10. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [electronic document]; available: http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html

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.

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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Previous *CAMH Population Studies eBulletins* are also available at http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html

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