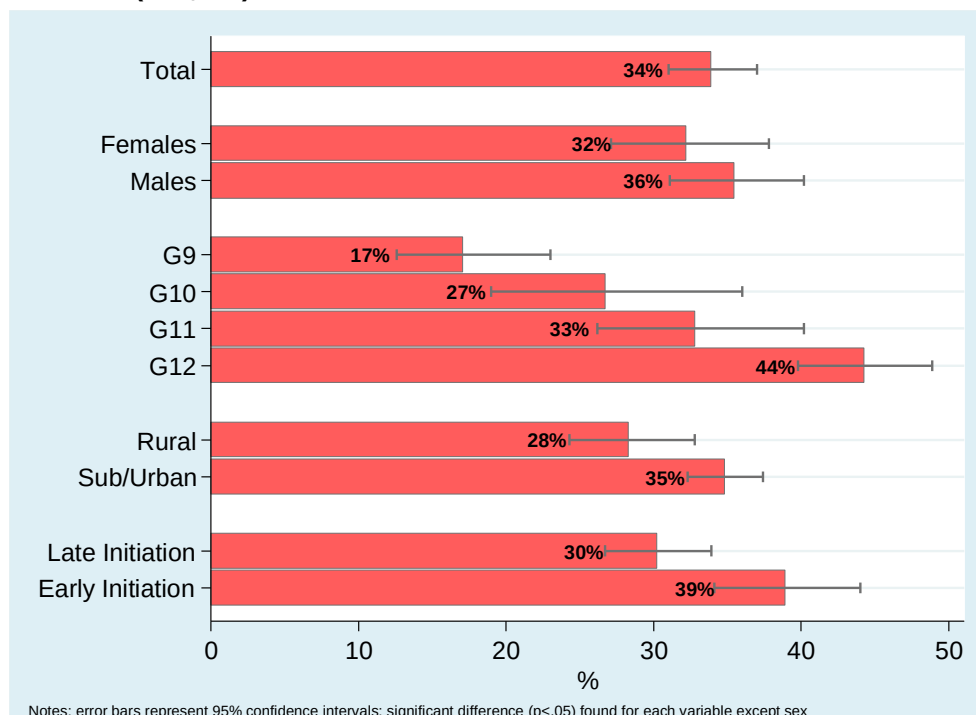


Hazardous or Harmful Drinking Among Secondary School Students in Ontario

This *eBulletin* presents demographic correlates of alcohol-related problems among secondary school students who drink alcohol. The World Health Organization's *Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test* (AUDIT) is used to identify students who report hazardous and harmful patterns of drinking. Data are from the 2013 cycle of the *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS). The OSDUHS is a repeated, cross-sectional, anonymous survey of students in grades 7–12 in Ontario, with the purpose of monitoring drug use, mental and physical health, gambling, and other risk behaviours. Conducted every two years since 1977, the OSDUHS is the longest ongoing school survey in Canada and one of the longest in the world. Results presented here are based on students in grades 9–12 who reported drinking alcohol in the past year.

As seen in Figure 1, about one-third (34%) of secondary school students who drink alcohol are classified as hazardous or harmful drinkers. That is, their drinking puts them at risk for current or future physical and social problems. Male and female drinkers are equally likely to drink at this level. Hazardous/harmful drinking significantly increases with grade, from 17% of 9th grade drinkers to 44% of 12th grade drinkers. Those who live in urban or suburban areas are significantly more likely than those who live in rural areas to indicate hazardous/harmful drinking (35% vs. 28%, respectively). Students who began drinking at an early age (before 9th grade) are significantly more likely than those who began drinking later to be classified as hazardous/harmful drinkers (39% vs. 30%, respectively).

Figure 1
Percentage of Ontario Secondary School Students (Grades 9–12) Who Drank Alcohol in the Past Year Classified as Hazardous or Harmful Drinkers, 2013 OSDUHS (n=1,806)



Methods

CAMH's *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS) is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary/middle school students in grades 7 and 8 and secondary school students in grades 9 through 12. This repeated cross-sectional survey has been conducted every two years since 1977. The 2013 survey, which used a stratified (region by school level) two-stage (school, class) cluster design, was based on 10,272 students in grades 7 through 12 from 42 public and Catholic school boards, 198 schools, and 671 classes. Self-completed questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were group administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University in classrooms between November 2012 and June 2013. Sixty-three percent (63%) of eligible students in participating classes completed the survey. The 2013 total sample of 10,272 students is representative of just under one million students enrolled in grades 7 through 12 in publicly funded schools in Ontario.

The findings presented here are based on a subsample of secondary school students who reported drinking alcohol (more than just a sip) in the past year ($n=1806$, about 60% of secondary school students). All estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were accommodated for the complex survey data.

Measures & Terminology

- **Hazardous or Harmful Drinking** was measured with the *Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test* (AUDIT), a 10-item instrument designed to identify problem drinking at the less severe end of the spectrum. Hazardous drinking refers to an established pattern of drinking that increases the likelihood of future medical and physical problems (e.g., dependence), whereas harmful drinking refers to a pattern of drinking that is already causing damage to one's health (e.g., alcohol-related injuries). Those with a score of eight or higher out of a maximum total of 40 are considered to be drinking at a hazardous/harmful level. The reference period for the AUDIT is the past 12 months before the survey.
- **Past year alcohol use** is defined as drinking any type of alcohol during the 12 months before the survey. Use includes consumption on special occasions, but excludes a sip just to try it.
- **Rural vs. urban/suburban** was derived from the first three digits (Forward Sortation Area) of the school's postal code. The assumption is that students live in the same FSA as their school.
- **Early initiation of alcohol use** is defined here as first trying alcohol before grade 9. Late initiation is defined as first trying alcohol in grade 9 or later.
- **95% confidence interval** shows the probable accuracy of the estimate – that is, with repeated sampling, 95 of 100 sample CIs would contain the “true” population value. Design-based confidence intervals account for characteristics of the sample design (i.e., stratification, clustering, weighting).
- **Statistically significant difference** refers to a difference between (or among) estimates that is statistically different at the $p<.05$ level, or lower, after adjusting for the sampling design. A finding of statistical significance implies that any differences are not likely due to chance alone.

Source

Boak, A., Hamilton, H. A., Adlaf, E. M., & Mann, R. E. (2013). *Drug use among Ontario students, 1977–2013: Detailed OSDUHS findings* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 36). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [Available online at <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>]

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