



Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling in Teenagers: What's up?

Highlights

The *Enquête québécoise sur le tabagisme chez les élèves du secondaire, 2000* (Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students) was conducted in the fall of 2000 by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* on a sample of 4,730 students in Secondary I to V in 156 French and English high schools, both public and private. In addition to the results on tobacco use (presented in Volume 1 of the research report), the 2000 survey also provided data on drinking, drug use and gambling among high school students, and these are presented in Volume 2, of which this document provides a brief summary.

On ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION, the survey revealed that, in the fall of 2000...

71% of Québec high school students stated they had consumed alcohol at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. Slightly more than half (51%) had drunk alcohol on an experimental basis (once just to try it) or occasionally (about once a month or less), while 20% of them were regular drinkers (weekly consumption). Daily consumption of alcohol was virtually non-existent (0.4%).

Approximately 22% of the students who indicated that they had consumed alcohol in the 12 months preceding the survey reported they had drunk to excess (five drinks or more on a single occasion) at least five times during this period, which is considered a repetitive heavy drinking behaviour (binge drinking).

Alcohol Consumption by Grade Level

The proportion of regular drinkers increased steadily with grade level, going from slightly less than 6% in Secondary I to 40% in Secondary V.

In Secondary I, 7% of students who had started drinking alcohol in the 12 months preceding the survey reported that during this period they had been repetitive heavy drinkers (binge drinkers); by Secondary V this proportion had risen to 36%.

Alcohol Consumption by Sex

Significantly more boys (22%) than girls (18%) drank alcohol on a weekly basis. Among those who had drunk alcohol in the 12 months preceding the survey, more boys than girls (27% vs. 16%) had engaged in repetitive heavy drinking behaviour (binge drinking).

On DRUG USE, the survey revealed that, in the fall of 2000...

42% of students reported having used drugs at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey, and more than two-thirds (72%) had used drugs in the 30 days preceding the survey. The data also showed that 47% of the students who had used drugs in the 12 months preceding the survey had done so at least once a week. The majority of them reported using cannabis.

The most popular drugs were cannabis (marijuana, hashish) and hallucinogens (LSD, PCP, mescaline, magic

mushrooms, ecstasy, etc.). In the 12 months preceding the survey, 41% of students had used cannabis, 16% hallucinogens. Prevalences were considerably lower for other drugs – 7% had used amphetamines, 5% cocaine, 2.9% solvents, 1.2% heroin and 2.3% other types of drugs or non-prescription medications. In the case of steroids, the survey revealed that 2.4% of students had used some in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Cannabis Use

One out of five students used cannabis frequently, whether on a weekly (15%) or daily (4.8%) basis; 14% used it only occasionally. Seven percent (7%) had tried it only once in the 12 months preceding the survey, and 59% had not used cannabis at all.

In Secondary I, 15% of students reported having used cannabis in the 12 months preceding the survey; this rose to 36% in Secondary II. In Secondary III and IV, cannabis use stabilised at approximately 50% of students, but then rose to a high of 61% in Secondary V.

Regular cannabis use, defined as weekly consumption, increased with grade level, going from 5% in Secondary I students to 22% in Secondary V students.

Significantly more boys than girls used cannabis (43% vs. 38%), and more than twice as many boys used it on a daily basis compared to girls (7% vs. 3%).

Hallucinogen Use

The survey revealed that 14% of students had used hallucinogenic drugs once a month or less, and nearly 2% (1.8%) had used them more than once a month in the 12 months preceding the survey.

The proportion of hallucinogenic drug users was nearly 5% in Secondary I, 14% in Secondary II, close to 20% in Secondary III and IV, and reached a high of 25% in Secondary V.

The rate of hallucinogenic drug use was the same among boys and girls – approximately 15%.

On ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE...

Based on the data, an *Index of Teenage Alcohol and Drug Abuse* was developed, revealing three categories of high school students. These categories, simplified by using the three colours of traffic lights – green, yellow and red – were designed to take into account substances, frequency of use, and effects on various aspects of young people's lives.

More than 80% of students (82%) fell into the Green Light category. These students had no obvious alcohol and drug abuse problem. This category mainly comprised students who used alcohol or cannabis on an experimental or occasional basis.

However, 13% of students fell into the Yellow Light category, which means that their use of drugs and alcohol could pose a problem. Students in this category generally presented a rather high prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use. Mild intervention is recommended for these students.

Approximately 6% of high school students were heavy consumers and were in the Red Light category. They especially stand out due to their use of hard drugs. These youths may require specialized intervention to treat addiction.

More boys were in the Red Light (7%) and Yellow light (14%) categories than girls (4.8% and 11% respectively).

Alcohol and drug abuse can seriously affect the lives of young people. Indeed, 61% of high school students in the Yellow and Red Light categories admitted having spent too much money or lost money as a result of their problem. Approximately 37% said they had committed delinquent acts while under the influence, and 33% acknowledged that their alcohol or drug abuse had negative effects on their relationship with their family.

On GAMBLING, the survey revealed that, in the fall of 2000...

An estimated 7 out of 10 high school students had already gambled in their lifetime. Almost two-thirds of students (63%) were occasional gamblers, and approximately 7% regular gamblers (had gambled at least once a week). Put another way, 12% of students who stated they had gambled during the 12 months preceding the survey had done so at least once a week. "Gambling" had a broad definition, covering lottery tickets, video lottery terminals (VLTs), the casino, cards, dice, bingo, sports pools, etc.

Problem Gambling

The survey revealed that 3.5% of students had a potential gambling problem. In the 12 months preceding the survey, these students had either discussed or argued with their family or friends about their gambling habit and/or had borrowed or stolen something in order to gamble or pay their gambling debts.

Gambling by Grade Level

The proportion of students who gambled increased with grade level. In Secondary I and II, approximately 60% of students reported having gambled. This rose to 76% in Secondary III, finally reaching a high of 80% in Secondary IV and V.

Gambling by Sex

The proportion of students who had never gambled was the same for boys and girls – approximately 30%. However, slightly more girls than boys had gambled occasionally (66% vs. 60%). Conversely, more boys than girls had gambled regularly (8% vs. 6%).

In all, more boys than girls stated they had experienced problems related to gambling (4.4% vs. 2.6%).

Gambling, Employment, and Spending Money

Students who had a job were more likely to be occasional (66%) or regular (8%) gamblers than those who did not have a job (59% and 5% respectively).

The more money a student had (whether or not it was obtained by working), the greater was his/her tendency to gamble, and to gamble more often. The proportion of regular gamblers rose from 4.3% in those who had \$10 or less a week for personal expenses, to 13% in those who had more than \$50 a week to spend.

Students who had more than \$50 a week in spending money were at higher risk of developing a gambling problem.

Gambling and Marks

The higher the students stated their marks were in English, the less likely they were to report having a gambling problem. The results also showed that the more a student expected to pursue his/her studies on a long-term basis, the less he/she tended to be a regular gambler, and the less likely he/she had experienced problems as a result of gambling.

Perception of Health Risks Associated with Regular Gambling

Approximately 40% of high school students believed that regular gambling poses a significant health risk. The stronger this perception in a student, the less likely he/she tended to gamble and report he/she had a gambling problem.

COMBINATIONS OF HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOURS...

Approximately 83% of high school students had engaged in at least one of the risk behaviours – cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use or gambling – regularly or occasionally, in the 12 months preceding the survey; 63% had engaged in at least two of the risk behaviours. About 36% of students had engaged in at least one of the four risk behaviours on a regular basis.

The three most prevalent combinations of risk behaviours were the following: 1) 17% stated they had drunk alcohol and gambled in the 12 months preceding the survey; 2) 16% stated they had engaged in all four risk behaviours,

and 3) 12% said they had engaged in three – alcohol consumption, drug use and gambling.

The data showed that the proportion of students who smoked cigarettes or used drugs exclusive of the other risk behaviours was virtually negligible (less than 1% for each). This shows that each of these behaviours was almost always combined with at least one of the other risk behaviours.

The Next Survey...

The *Enquête québécoise sur le tabagisme chez les élèves du secondaire* (Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students) is a biennial survey. Its primary goal is monitoring smoking among Québec teenagers. However, as shown in the 2000 edition, the design of the survey lends itself to studying other risk behaviours such as alcohol consumption, drug use and gambling. Therefore the 3rd edition of this survey, which will be conducted in the fall of 2002, will likely cover these behaviours as well as tobacco use, thereby providing a means of monitoring their progress among teenagers.

Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling in Teenagers : What's Up? Volume 2 of the Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students- is available (in French only) on the website of the Institut de la statistique du Québec: <http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca>

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