

Male Ontario students show declines in fighting; females show elevated bullying and mental distress

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An ongoing survey of Ontario students in grades 7 to 12 conducted for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) shows that while the majority of students have healthy relationships and report overall good mental and physical health, some negative trends, especially among girls, have raised concerns.

The 2011 Ontario Student [Drug Use](#) and [Health Survey](#) (OSDUHS) Mental Health and Well-Being Report released today reveals important trends in mental and physical health and risk behaviours among Ontario students.

Psychological distress and suicidal ideation

The number of students reporting [psychological distress](#) has remained high at around 34 per cent since tracking began in 1999. "Many of these students express feelings of [unhappiness](#) and depression, anxiety, social dysfunction, constant stress or loss of sleep," said Dr. Robert Mann, CAMH Senior Scientist and lead investigator on the study. "What is concerning in this year's survey is that among female students, this rate has risen to 43 per cent, up from 36 per cent in the 1999 survey. Also, girls are reporting distress at a disproportionately high rate compared to 24 per cent of boys who reported these feelings."

Along with [psychological stress](#) and [poor body image](#), suicidal ideation is

a concern among female students. The survey showed that girls report both contemplating (14 per cent) and attempting suicide (4 per cent) at twice the rate as the boys surveyed.

Bullying and anti-social behaviour

Bullying behaviours also remain a concern, with 29 per cent of students – an estimated 288,000 students – reporting being the victim of bullying while at school. This has not significantly changed since the first time it was measured in 2003. However, cyber-bullying, a new measure in the 2011 survey, was reported by one in five students. This represents an estimated 217,000 students in Ontario.

The positive news is that males report a decline in bullying victimization, bullying perpetration and fighting in school. Girls report being twice as likely as boys to be the victim of cyber-bullying, at 28 per cent versus 15 per cent. A greater percentage of girls than boys also report being victimized at school, at 31 per cent versus 26 per cent.

"The bullying rates surrounding girls are troubling," said Dr. David Wolfe, Director of CAMH's Centre for Prevention Science. "Bullying can have long-term mental health consequences and can affect self esteem, and hinder the ability to form [healthy relationships](#). The high rates in cyber-bullying are also troubling in that young people today are so technology-driven that bullying now carries over into the home, not just the school setting."

Overall, students also report a decrease during the past two decades in anti-social behaviours including vandalism, theft, assaulting others and carrying a weapon.

Screen time, physical health and gambling

One in 10 students spend at least seven hours per day in front of the television or computer, and only one in five students engages in the recommended amount of daily physical activity. Twenty-six per cent of Ontario students are classified as obese or overweight, with males (30 per cent) significantly more likely to be obese/overweight than females (21 per cent).

Injuries from motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death among young people. More than one in four students (28 per cent) report that they do not always wear a seatbelt when riding in a motor vehicle. As well, 42 per cent of respondents reported being treated for an injury at least once in the past year.

Thirty-eight per cent of students say they gamble money at activities such as card playing, buying lottery tickets and betting in sports pools, although the survey shows that gambling activity among students has decreased over the past few years.

The report examined the amount of time students report playing video games. Twenty-three per cent of students overall (37 per cent of males) report playing video games daily and 12 per cent of students show possible indicators of video gaming problems, reporting symptoms of preoccupation, loss of control, withdrawal, and disruption to family and school. There has been no significant change in reported video gaming problems during the past few years.

"We need to keep an eye on how much time our kids spend in front of the TV and online or playing video games," said Dr. Bruce Ballon, Head of CAMH's Adolescent Clinical and Educational Services (A.C.E.S.) for Problem Gambling, Gaming and Internet Use. "Often we see kids engaging in these behaviours to dissociate from others because there is an underlying mental health problem that hasn't been diagnosed, such as depression or social anxiety."

Regional differences

Toronto

- Compared to the provincial average, students in Toronto are more likely to be worried about being threatened or harmed at school; to engage in no physical activity; and to report a high level of "screen time."
- Compared to the provincial average, students in Toronto are less likely to report being cyber-bullied or bullied while at school, and less likely to report an injury requiring medical care.

Northern Region

- Compared to the provincial average, students in Northern Ontario are more likely to report an injury requiring medical care.
- Compared to the provincial average, students in Northern Ontario are less likely to be physically inactive.

Eastern Region

- Compared to the provincial average, students in Eastern Ontario are less likely to be physically inactive, to report a high level of screen time or to rate their [physical health](#) as poor.

Western Region

- Compared to the provincial average, [students](#) in Western Ontario are more likely to report being cyber-bullied.

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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