

Adult drug use stable over ten years: ARF

Addiction Research Foundation (ARF) researchers have completed a survey which indicates alcohol and other drug use by adults in Ontario has remained stable over the last decade.

There even seems to be a decrease in cannabis use among young men, generally the most frequent users.

Those are the findings of a 13-year survey just completed by ARF researchers Reg Smart, PhD, and Ed Adlaf. The survey results challenge recent newspaper stories about alcohol and other drug use among different groups and will help workers target assistance more accurately, says Dr. Smart, head of ARF's prevention studies.

The survey was started in 1977 and repeated in 1982, '84, and '87. It examines frequency of use for alcohol, sleeping pills, stimulants, tranquilizers, cannabis, and cocaine among Ontario adults.

Using the Gallup Ontario Omnibus, the researchers sampled population areas from large cities to rural villages to get a representative group of all adults more than 18 years old.

Data were analyzed according to age, sex, geographic location, education, occupation, and gross family income.

COCAINE: The survey is the first to estimate cocaine use in the form of crack among Ontario adults: it suggests use is rare in Ontario - 0.7 per cent, compared to 4 per cent among United States high school seniors.

Dr. Smart comments that although more adults in Ontario are reporting having tried cocaine once

(6.1 per cent), which should be viewed with concern, "the perception that crack use in Canada is either epidemic or at levels comparable to the US is unwarranted at this time."

The number of people reporting cocaine use "in the last 12 months" remains unchanged between 1984 and 1987, although the number reporting ever having used cocaine seems to have increased, especially among 18 to 29 year olds, where it has doubled.

CANNABIS: Cannabis use appears to be declining among the 18 to 29 year age group and increasing among 30 to 49 year olds.

Dr. Smart considers this latter group is a "heavy-user cohort" - those who got used to smoking marijuana in the 1960s still smoke, while youngsters are not necessarily taking it up.

ALCOHOL: In drinking patterns, older men report the highest rate of daily drinking. Overall, however, rates of daily drinking remained constant throughout the 10 years. The pattern seems to show increases in binge drinking (more than five drinks in a sitting) among younger adults, especially men in northern Ontario, and among those with post-secondary education.

Binge drinking among young women increased from 1984 to 1987, but the '87 rate doesn't differ from the '82 rate.

STIMULANTS: Stimulants used to be a kids' 'kick', and while use is still more likely in those aged 18 to 29 years, more than half of users say they use stimulants only once a month or less.

SLEEPING PILLS: Sleeping pill use doesn't appear to be on the increase, except among young women: up to 7.1 per cent in 1987 from 2.2 per cent in 1984.

Nevertheless, Dr. Smart believes the apparent increase may not be born out in subsequent surveys: "I don't think it's a long-term trend."

TRANQUILLIZERS: Tranquillizers appear to be the most frequently used drug. Daily use is also highest of the drugs surveyed: 38.7 per cent of tranquillizer users take them daily.

People without jobs seem to take the most tranquillizers, although overall use decreased over the decade of the ARF survey.

And, housewives don't top the poll, that spot's reserved for the disabled or retired. Those with elementary school education are three times as likely to take tranquillizers as those with post-secondary education, as are those with an annual family income less than \$10,000, compared to those whose annual family income is \$50,000.

GENERAL: Dr. Smart acknowledges that under-reporting - estimating use as less than it is really - is "very likely" and a "major problem" in most surveys.

"Cannabis users tend to be fairly accurate in their reporting," he says.

But, he acknowledges that cocaine users may differ: "No one's yet done any validity studies on cocaine use, and it really ought to be looked into."

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- Eat an apple and drink a large glass of water before going to those dinner parties. This will help fill you up so otherwise tempting foods are no threat.
- Offer to bring a fresh vegetable or fruit tray.
- Avoid fried foods or those in rich sauces or gravies. Lean meats, fruits and vegetables are your best choice. And, pass on rich desserts.

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