

Study reveals no real change in drug use during past two-years

A new survey by the Addiction Research Foundation (ARF) shows that drug and alcohol use among Ontario adults remained at the same level between 1987 and 1989.

"In the general population, there are no significant changes in the use of alcohol, sleeping pills, stimulants, tranquillizers, cannabis and cocaine over the last two years," says Dr. Reg Smart, head of Prevention Studies at ARF, who conducted the survey with scientist Ed Adlaf.

However, there were changes within a few subgroups of the population: daily drinking declined among 18 to 29 years olds and among professionals and managers; tranquillizer use increased among 18 to 29 years old women, cannabis use increased among residents of Northern Ontario and among the unemployed.

"At first glance, the study results may seem to contradict recent reports of dramatic increases in drug use," say the authors.

"However, in this survey we attempt to show the broad picture of drug use in Ontario. Certain communities or neighborhoods may be experiencing increasing drug problems which are not fully reflected in a broad survey."

The study shows a number of long-term trends in adult drug use since 1977: daily drinking declined among the total population; tranquillizer use declined among the total population; binge drinking - five or more drinks at a single sitting - increased among men over 50; use of cannabis increased among 30 to 49 year old men.

"The most perplexing long-term trend is the increase in drug use by young women. The survey shows that the use of sleeping pills, stimulants, tranquillizers, and cannabis increased among 18 to 29 year old women. Binge drinking also increased among young women. We looked at a number of factors in trying to explain this trend. However, an analysis of the data show that drug use among young women increased regardless of employment status, occupation or marital status. Further reports will exam-

ine this trend in greater detail," say the authors.

"The survey shows that illegal drug use is a serious problem in Ontario, however, problems caused by alcohol far outrank the problems caused by illegal drugs. Over 86 per cent of adults consume alcohol and ten per cent have serious drinking problems. In contrast, cocaine is used by two per cent of adults, crack is used by less than one per cent of adults. We should never forget that although illegal drug use causes problems for many individuals and for our society, alcohol is still the drug of choice," say Smart and Adlaf.

Here are some of the highlights of the study:

- In 1989, 82.6 per cent of adults 18 years of age and older report drinking at least once during that past 12 months.

- Men are more likely than women to drink alcohol and are much more likely to drink heavily.

- Among men, 14.7 per cent report serious drinking problems; only 3.6 per cent of women report serious drinking problems.

- Over 90 per cent of 30 to 39 year olds use alcohol, over 66 per cent of adults over 65 use alcohol.

- The likelihood of alcohol use increases with education. A total of 66.8 per cent of adults with elementary school education use alcohol, 88.5 per cent of adults with post-secondary education use alcohol.

- In 1989, 10.5 per cent of adults report using cannabis at least once in the last year. The majority of cannabis users report using it less than once a month. About 3.2 per cent report daily use.

- Men are more likely than women to use cannabis.

- The likelihood of cannabis use declines with age. Eighteen to 29 year olds are most likely to report cannabis use.

The likelihood of cannabis use increases with education. A total of 2.4 per cent of adults with elementary school education use cannabis, 12.6 per cent of adults with post-secondary education use cannabis.

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