

Nearly 50 percent of grade 12 students in Ontario report texting while driving

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An ongoing survey of Ontario students in grades 7 to 12 conducted for Canada's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) reveals a number of significant behavioural trends, including an alarming number of young people who are texting while driving.

According to the 2013 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) Mental Health and Well-Being Report, over one-third of licensed Ontario [students](#) in grades 10 to 12 – an estimated 108,000 adolescent drivers – report texting while driving at least once in the past year, with 46 per cent of licensed students in grade 12 reporting this behaviour.

The OSDUHS is a bi-annual survey that reveals important trends in mental and physical health and [risk behaviours](#) among Ontario's middle and high school students.

Risk behaviours and physical health

Although the majority (65 per cent) of students rate their [physical health](#) as excellent or very good, certain risk behaviours have emerged or increased. Overall, the percentage of students reporting an injury that required medical treatment significantly increased from 35 per cent in 2003 to 41 per cent in 2013.

"We asked about texting while driving because research shows that this is a very hazardous behaviour," said Dr. Robert Mann, CAMH Senior Scientist and Principal Investigator. "We were surprised to find that so many [young people](#) are taking this risk."

Another new indicator in the survey found that up to 79 per cent of bicyclists in this age group report they do not always wear a helmet and 53 per cent report rarely or never wearing a helmet.

"The very high rates of young people who do not

always wear helmets while cycling is troubling because of the potential for very serious injury," said Dr. Mann. "We're learning more about the association between traumatic brain injuries and [mental health issues](#) in young people and it's important to get the message out that wearing your helmet can prevent a whole range of problems," he said.

Girls more likely to have low self-esteem and contemplate suicide

The proportion of young females indicating [poor mental health](#) remains high when compared to their male counterparts. Overall, 15 per cent of students rated their mental health as fair to poor, the two lowest categories on a five point scale, with females being twice as likely to do so.

"We continue to see that, compared to their male classmates, young females are far more likely to report higher rates of internalizing [mental health problems](#) like low self-esteem, psychological distress and suicidal ideation," said Dr. Hayley Hamilton, CAMH Scientist and Co-Investigator on the OSDUHS. "Significantly, girls reported contemplating suicide at twice the rate of the boys surveyed. This disparity is consistent with past surveys and points to a difference in need that parents, teachers and care providers should be aware of."

Not knowing where to find help also emerged as an issue, said Dr. Hamilton. Twenty-eight per cent – an estimated 288,300 students – reported that, in the past year, there was a time when they wanted to talk to someone about a mental health problem, but did not know where to turn. Again, females were twice as likely as males to report an unmet need for mental health support at 38 per cent and 19 per cent respectively.

"This is a troubling number, and reflects what we are seeing in research we are conducting at a

national level," said Dr. Joanna Henderson, Clinical Scientist and Head of Research in CAMH's Child, Youth & Family Program. "We're learning that young people need and are looking for a larger scope of [mental health](#) services that may not be readily available. For those who aren't experiencing a crisis but want to talk about how they're doing, building up peer support, school and community-based programs are good options."

Home and school life

More than 80 per cent of students visit social media sites daily, with about one in ten spending five hours or more on these sites daily. One in five students play video games daily or almost daily with males being almost four times as likely as females to do so.

Since 1999, more students report that they like school "very much" or "quite a lot," increasing from 29 per cent to 44 per cent. "This is an encouraging shift," Dr. Mann said. "It's important that students feel that school is a positive place to learn and grow."

Dr. Mann said another positive shift is the decrease in schoolyard bullying with rates falling from 33 per cent in 2003 to 25 per cent in 2013. Similarly, the percentage reporting bullying others at school declined over the past decade from 30 per cent in 2003 to 16 per cent in 2013. Rates of cyberbullying, did not significantly change between 2011 (22 per cent), the first year of monitoring, and 2013 (19 per cent).

Another positive finding was that students also reported a decrease in antisocial behaviour and physical fighting at school.

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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