

USE OF CANNABIS AND OTHER ILLICIT DRUGS

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In 2002, about 3 million Canadians aged 15 or older, or 12.2%, admitted having used cannabis—that is, marijuana or hashish—at least once in the previous 12 months. This estimate, based on data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), represents a significant increase in self-reported drug use over the last decade. In 1989, 6.5% of Canadians reported using cannabis; by 1994, the figure had risen to 7.4%.^{1,2} This rise in drug use mirrors another recent study, which showed increased cannabis use among Ontario high school students over the same period.³ It may also partly reflect changing attitudes about drug use.

Other drugs

The CCHS collected data on five other drugs: cocaine/crack, ecstasy, LSD and other hallucinogens, speed/amphetamines, and heroin. Overall, 2.4% of Canadians aged 15 or older had used at least one of these drugs in the year before the survey—up from 1.6% in 1994. An estimated 321,000 people (1.3%) had used cocaine/crack, making it the most commonly used of these other drugs.

Among “current users” (people who had used any illicit drug in the past year), 81.2% had used cannabis only. Another 16.0% reported both

cannabis and one of the other drugs, and the remaining 2.9% had used one of the other drugs, but not cannabis.

Males, teens—higher use

A higher proportion of males (15.5%) than females (9.1%) had used cannabis in the past year. Similarly, more males than females had used other illicit drugs (Table A). With one exception (15- to-17- year-olds),

males in all age groups were more likely than females to be cannabis users (Table B).

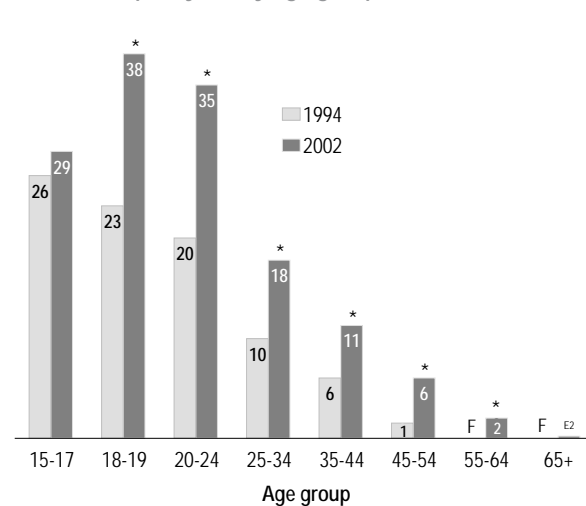
Cannabis use was most prevalent at younger ages. About 3 in 10 teens aged 15 to 17 (29%) reported having used marijuana or hashish in the past year. Cannabis use peaked at ages 18 and 19, reaching 38%. After age 24, the percentage of current users began to drop, although numbers in the age groups from 25-to-34 to 45-to-54 were still substantial.

Between 1994 and 2002, cannabis use rose significantly in all age groups but two: 15-to-17 and 65-or-older.

Frequency

Among people who had used cannabis in the past year, the frequency of use varied. Close to half (47%) used the drug less than once a month. One in ten reported weekly use, and another 10%, daily.

Percentage of population aged 15 or older who used cannabis in past year, by age group, 1994 and 2002



Data sources: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey; 1994 Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey
 * Significantly higher than estimate for 1994 ($p < 0.05$)
 E2 Coefficient of variation 25.1% to 33.3%
 F Coefficient of variation greater than 33.3%

As a percentage of the total population aged 15 or older, 1.1% of Canadians used cannabis daily; 2.8%, more than once a week; 3.9%, at least once a week; and 6.0%, at least once a month. In general, males were more likely than females to be frequent users.

Frequency of cannabis use in past year

| | Total | Male | Female |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|--------|
| | % | | |
| Among current users: | | | |
| Less than once a month | 47.3 | 41.3 | 57.5* |
| 1 to 3 times a month | 18.0 | 18.2 | 17.6 |
| Once a week | 9.7 | 11.3 | 7.1* |
| More than once a week | 15.3 | 18.2 | 10.3* |
| Every day | 9.7 | 11.1 | 7.4* |

Data source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey
 * Significantly different from estimate for males ($p < 0.05$)

In 2002, over 10 million people reported having tried cannabis at least once. This represents 41.3% of the population aged 15 or older. When one-time-only users are excluded, the figure drops to 32.0%.

In the provinces

In every province except Manitoba, the level of cannabis use was higher in 2002 than in 1994. In 2002, rates of cannabis use significantly exceeded the national average in Québec and British Columbia (Table B). Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan had lower-than-average rates.

Lifetime use

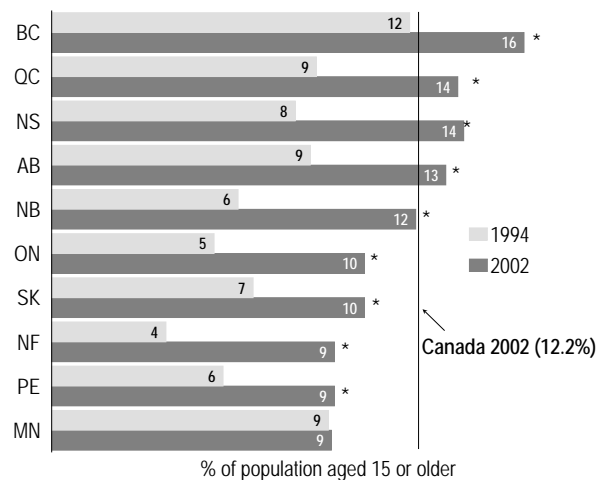
Although most Canadians are not current users of illicit drugs, many have tried them at some point in their lives. Men were more likely than women to have tried an illicit drug.

Lifetime use of other illicit drugs ranged from 0.7% for heroin to 8.4% for LSD and other hallucinogens (Table A). When illicit drugs excluding cannabis are combined, 13.7% of the population, or 3.4 million people, have tried one of them.

In 2002, lifetime use of cannabis was highest for young adults aged 18 to 24, declined gradually through ages 25 to 54, and then dropped off quickly. The pattern was similar for other illicit drugs (Table B).

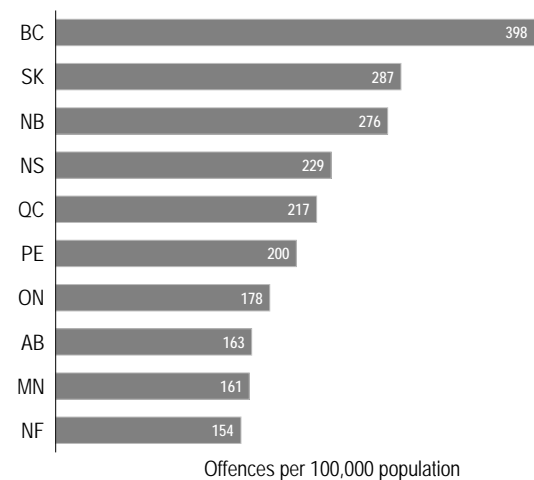
The percentage of residents who had ever used cannabis was above the national average in Nova Scotia, Alberta and British Columbia. In terms of other drugs, Québec, Alberta and British Columbia were above the overall average.

Cannabis use in past year, by province, 1994 and 2002



Data sources: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey; 1994 Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey
 * Significantly higher than estimate for 1994 ($p < 0.05$)

Federal drug offences related to cannabis, by province



Data source: Canadian Crime Statistics, 2002 (Reference 4)

Criminal offences for cannabis rising

The *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, which governs drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and heroin and restricted substances such as ecstasy and LSD, can lead to a charge and conviction for a criminal offence.

Between 1991 and 2002, the rate of cannabis-related drug offences increased from 119 to 223 offences per 100,000 population. Most of these offences (72%) involved possession. Other charges included trafficking, production and importation.

In 2002, British Columbia had the highest rate of cannabis drug offences; Newfoundland and Labrador, the lowest. However, information on drug offences is based on police records, and may reflect enforcement efforts as much as differences in drug activity.⁵

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The Questions

Respondents to both the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey (CADS) were asked: "Have you ever used or tried marijuana, cannabis or hashish?" and, if so, "Have you used it in the past 12 months?" Respondents who had used cannabis at least once in the past 12 months were considered to be *current users*. Similar questions were asked about the other illicit drugs.

The data are limited by the possibility of under-reporting. Although respondents were assured of confidentiality, some may have been reluctant to report drug use. Furthermore, the likelihood of under-reporting may have been different in 1994 than in 2002.

Data sources

Use of cannabis and other illicit drugs in 2002 was estimated using data from cycle 1.2 of the **Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS)**, which began in May 2002 and was conducted over eight months.⁶ The CCHS covers people aged 15 or older living in private dwellings in the 10 provinces. Residents of the three territories, Indian reserves, institutions, and certain remote areas, as well as full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces, were excluded. The sample consisted of 36,984 persons aged 15 or older; the response rate was 77%.

For this article, to account for survey design effects, standard errors and coefficients of variation were estimated using the bootstrap technique.^{7,8}

Estimates of *use of cannabis and other illicit drugs in 1994* are from **Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey (CADS)**. CADS covered people living in the 10 provinces. Full-time residents of institutions and residents of the territories were excluded. Data collection began in September 1994 and was conducted over three months. The sample consisted of 12,155 people aged 15 or older; the response rate was 76%. For this article, a survey design effect of 1.43 was used to partially account for the survey not being a simple random sample.

Estimates of criminal offences come from the **Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR)** survey. The UCR consists of data on incidents that have come to the attention of the police. The survey counts only the most serious offence committed in each criminal incident, and consequently, underestimates the total number of drug-related incidents. Additional information about the UCR can be found on the Statistics Canada website (www.statcan.ca).

References

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- 2 Statistics Canada. Illicit drug use. In: *1999 Statistical Report on the Health of Canadians* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 82-570) 1999: 184-7.
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- 4 Statistics Canada. *Canadian Crime Statistics, 2002* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 85-205XPE) Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003.
- 5 Desjardins N, Hotton T. Trends in drug offences and the role of alcohol and drugs in crime. *Juristat* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 85-002) 2004; 24(1): 1-24.
- 6 Béland Y, Dufour J, Gravel R. *Sample Design of the Canadian Mental Health Survey, 2001*. Proceedings of the Survey Methods Section. Vancouver: Statistical Society of Canada, 2001.
- 7 Rao JNK, Wu CFJ, Yue K. Some recent work on resampling methods for complex surveys. *Survey Methodology* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 12-001) 1992; 18(2): 209-17.
- 8 Rust K, Rao JNK. Variance estimation for complex surveys using replication techniques. *Statistical Methods in Medical Research* 1996; 5: 281-310.

Table A

Illicit drug use, by sex, household population aged 15 or older, Canada excluding territories

| | Past year | | | | | | Lifetime | | | | | |
|--|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Total | | Male | | Female | | Total | | Male | | Female | |
| | '000 | % | '000 | % | '000 | % | '000 | % | '000 | % | '000 | % |
| Cannabis ¹ | 3,049 | 12.2 | 1,896 | 15.5 | 1,153 | 9.1* | 10,315 | 41.3 | 5,758 | 47.0 | 4,558 | 35.9* |
| Cannabis ² | 2,824 | 11.3 | 1,780 | 14.5 | 1,043 | 8.2* | 7,993 | 32.0 | 4,595 | 37.5 | 3,399 | 26.8* |
| Cocaine/Crack | 321 | 1.3 | 235 | 1.9 | 86 | 0.7* | 2,001 | 8.0 | 1,311 | 10.7 | 690 | 5.4* |
| Ecstasy | 199 | 0.8 | 121 | 1.0 | 78 | 0.6* | 732 | 2.9 | 455 | 3.7 | 277 | 2.2* |
| Hallucinogens (LSD, PCP) | 145 | 0.6 | 98 | 0.8 | 48 | 0.4* | 2,098 | 8.4 | 1,356 | 11.1 | 741 | 5.8* |
| Speed (amphetamines) | 136 | 0.5 | 83 | 0.7 | 53 ^{E1} | 0.4* ^{E1} | 1,148 | 4.6 | 736 | 6.0 | 412 | 3.2* |
| Heroin | 10 ^{E2} | 0.0 ^{E2} | 7 ^{E2} | 0.1 ^{E2} | F | F | 185 | 0.7 | 131 | 1.1 | 54 | 0.4* |
| Any illicit drug excluding cannabis | 589 | 2.4 | 392 | 3.2 | 198 | 1.6* | 3,410 | 13.7 | 2,118 | 17.3 | 1,291 | 10.2* |

Data source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey

Note: Because of rounding, detail may not add to totals.

¹Includes one-time use

²Excludes one-time use

* Significantly different from estimate for males ($p < 0.05$)

E1 Coefficient of variation 16.6% to 25.0%

E2 Coefficient of variation 25.1% to 33.3%

F Coefficient of variation greater than 33.3%

Table B
Illicit drug use, by age, sex and province, household population aged 15 or older, Canada excluding territories

| | Currently use cannabis | | Lifetime | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| | '000 | % | Cannabis [†] | | Other illicit drug [‡] | |
| | | | '000 | % | '000 | % |
| Total | 3,049 | 12.2 | 7,993 | 32.0 | 3,410 | 13.7 |
| Male | 1,896 | 15.5 | 4,595 | 37.5 | 2,118 | 17.3 |
| Female | 1,153 | 9.1 * | 3,399 | 26.8* | 1,291 | 10.2* |
| Age group | | | | | | |
| 15-17 | 388 | 28.5 | 405 | 29.7 | 109 | 8.0 |
| Male | 200 | 28.4 | 210 | 29.8 | 57 | 8.1 |
| Female | 188 | 28.6 | 195 | 29.6 | 52 | 7.8 |
| 18-19 | 327 | 38.2 § | 416 | 48.5 § | 156 | 18.2 § |
| Male | 187 | 42.3 | 224 | 50.7 | 79 | 17.9 |
| Female | 140 | 33.8 * | 192 | 46.2 | 77 | 18.4 |
| 20-24 | 670 | 35.1 | 995 | 52.1 | 477 | 25.0 § |
| Male | 398 | 41.4 | 552 | 57.4 | 282 | 29.3 |
| Female | 272 | 28.7 * | 443 | 46.8* | 195 | 20.6* |
| 25-34 | 717 | 17.7 § | 1,813 | 44.8 § | 889 | 22.0 § |
| Male | 461 | 23.1 | 1,030 | 51.5 | 555 | 27.8 |
| Female | 256 | 12.5 * | 784 | 38.3* | 333 | 16.3* |
| 35-44 | 608 | 11.2 § | 2,432 | 44.7 | 1,046 | 19.2 § |
| Male | 420 | 15.3 | 1,404 | 51.0 | 654 | 23.8 |
| Female | 188 | 7.0 * | 1,027 | 38.2* | 393 | 14.6* |
| 45-54 | 266 | 6.0 § | 1,491 | 33.6 § | 596 | 13.4 § |
| Male | 182 | 8.4 | 893 | 41.2 | 394 | 18.2 |
| Female | 85 | 3.7 * | 598 | 26.3* | 202 | 8.9* |
| 55-64 | 64 | 2.0 § | 363 | 11.4 § | 112 | 3.5 § |
| Male | 42 ^{E1} | 2.6 ^{E1} | 234 | 14.6 | 81 | 5.1 |
| Female | 22 ^{E1} | 1.4* ^{E1} | 129 | 8.2* | 31 | 2.0* |
| 65+ | 9 ^{E2} | 0.2 ^{§E2} | 78 | 2.1 § | 25 ^{E1} | 0.7 ^{§E1} |
| Male | F | F | 48 | 3.0 | 16 ^{E2} | 1.0 ^{E2} |
| Female | F | F | 30 | 1.4* | 9 ^{E2} | 0.4 ^{E2} |
| Province | | | | | | |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 41 | 9.4 ^{††} | 119 | 27.2 ^{††} | 31 | 7.1 ^{††} |
| Prince Edward Island | 11 | 9.4 ^{††} | 33 | 29.1 | 9 | 7.9 ^{††} |
| Nova Scotia | 104 | 13.7 | 267 | 35.4 ^{††} | 88 | 11.7 ^{††} |
| New Brunswick | 73 | 12.1 | 179 | 29.5 | 66 | 10.9 ^{††} |
| Québec | 816 | 13.5 ^{††} | 1,994 | 33.1 | 939 | 15.6 ^{††} |
| Ontario | 1,004 | 10.4 ^{††} | 2,746 | 28.5 ^{††} | 1,011 | 10.5 ^{††} |
| Manitoba | 80 | 9.3 ^{††} | 251 | 29.0 ^{††} | 101 | 11.7 ^{††} |
| Saskatchewan | 79 | 10.4 ^{††} | 220 | 29.1 ^{††} | 83 | 11.0 ^{††} |
| Alberta | 318 | 13.1 | 896 | 37.0 ^{††} | 412 | 17.0 ^{††} |
| British Columbia | 523 | 15.7 ^{††} | 1,286 | 38.7 ^{††} | 669 | 20.1 ^{††} |

Data source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey

Note: Because of rounding, detail may not add to totals.

† Excludes one-time use

‡ Includes cocaine/crack, ecstasy, hallucinogens, amphetamines, and heroin

 * Significantly different from estimate for males ($p < 0.05$)

 § Significantly different from estimate for next younger age group ($p < 0.05$)

 †† Significantly different from estimate for Canada ($p < 0.05$)

E1 Coefficient of variation 16.6% to 25.0%

E2 Coefficient of variation 25.1% to 33.3%

F Coefficient of variation greater than 33.3%