

# **Student Drug Use in Northwestern Ontario**

## **Results of the Northwestern Ontario Student Drug Use Survey 1997 – 2005**

**Lee E. Sieswerda**

**Epidemiologist**

**Thunder Bay District Health Unit  
Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada**

**Jill M. Starkes**

**Epidemiologist**

**Thunder Bay District Health Unit  
Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada**

**Edward M. Adlaf**

**Research Scientist**

**Centre for Addiction and Mental Health  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada**

For copies of this report and more information, please contact:

Lee E. Sieswerda, Epidemiologist  
Thunder Bay District Health Unit  
999 Balmoral Street  
Thunder Bay, Ontario  
Canada P7B 6E7

### ***Participating Agencies***

Thunder Bay District Health Unit  
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Kenora,  
Thunder Bay, and Toronto offices)  
Thunder Bay Drug Awareness Committee  
Northwestern Health Unit

Ogden-East End FOCUS Coalition  
Ignace C.O.R.E. FOCUS Coalition  
Red Lake/Ear Falls FOCUS Coalition  
Rainy River SAP Coalition

### ***Acknowledgements***

While we do not list the schools and Boards of Education that participated in the study for confidentiality reasons, we would like to acknowledge the school boards, principals, and teachers that allowed us to interview their students. The pressures of today's curriculum leave little time for additional projects such as this one and we recognize and appreciate the teachers that allocated class time to this survey. We hope the insights provided by this report are due recompense for their efforts. We also thank the students themselves for completing the surveys. Without their willingness and honesty this ongoing project would not be possible.

Kim Karioja of the Thunder Bay office of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health aided greatly in the organization of the survey. Rose-Marie Farwell compiled and formatted many of the tabl

We would also like to thank the dedicated public health nurses who volunteered to help conduct the surveys and the Toronto office of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health for their continued support.

Printed in Canada  
Copyright © 2006  
Thunder Bay District Health Unit

Individuals, as well as educational and health organizations, are invited to photocopy, in whole or in part, the contents of this report. Figures and tables may be used provided that appropriate citation is given.

Please cite as:

Sieswerda LE, Starkes JM, Adlaf EM. Student Drug Use in Northwestern Ontario: Results of the Northwestern Ontario Student Drug Use Survey, 1997 – 2005. Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Thunder Bay, Ontario: 2006.

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

This Report summarizes the prevalence of drug use by students in northwestern Ontario as reported by students on the Northwestern Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (NWOSDUS). This is the third cycle of the NWOSDUS, previous cycles occurring in 1997 and 2001.

Not only does the NWOSDUS contribute to identifying the current patterns in alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, but it also helps us to understand the precipitating factors and the consequent negative personal and social outcomes. This knowledge helps local agencies concerned about student drug use to evaluate the effectiveness of their past prevention and enforcement activities and to design effective interventions for the future.

The NWOSDUS uses the same instrument as the Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS), enabling us to compare student drug use patterns in Northwestern Ontario with their provincial counterparts.

The NWOSDUS is based on the methodology of the biennial province-wide OSDUS conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). NWOSDUS was first conducted in 1997 in response to the fact that the OSDUS does not have a sufficient sample size to report results at the local level for Northwestern Health Unit or for Thunder Bay District Health Unit. The OSDUS only reports results for the entire “North”, which includes Algoma, Cochrane, Manitoulin, Sudbury (R.M.), Sudbury (T.D.), Muskoka, Parry Sound, Nipissing, Timiskaming, Thunder Bay, Kenora and Rainy River.

In contrast, the NWOSDUS is conducted only in the City of Thunder Bay, District of Thunder Bay and Kenora-Rainy River, allowing us to report reliable results for the three local regional groupings.

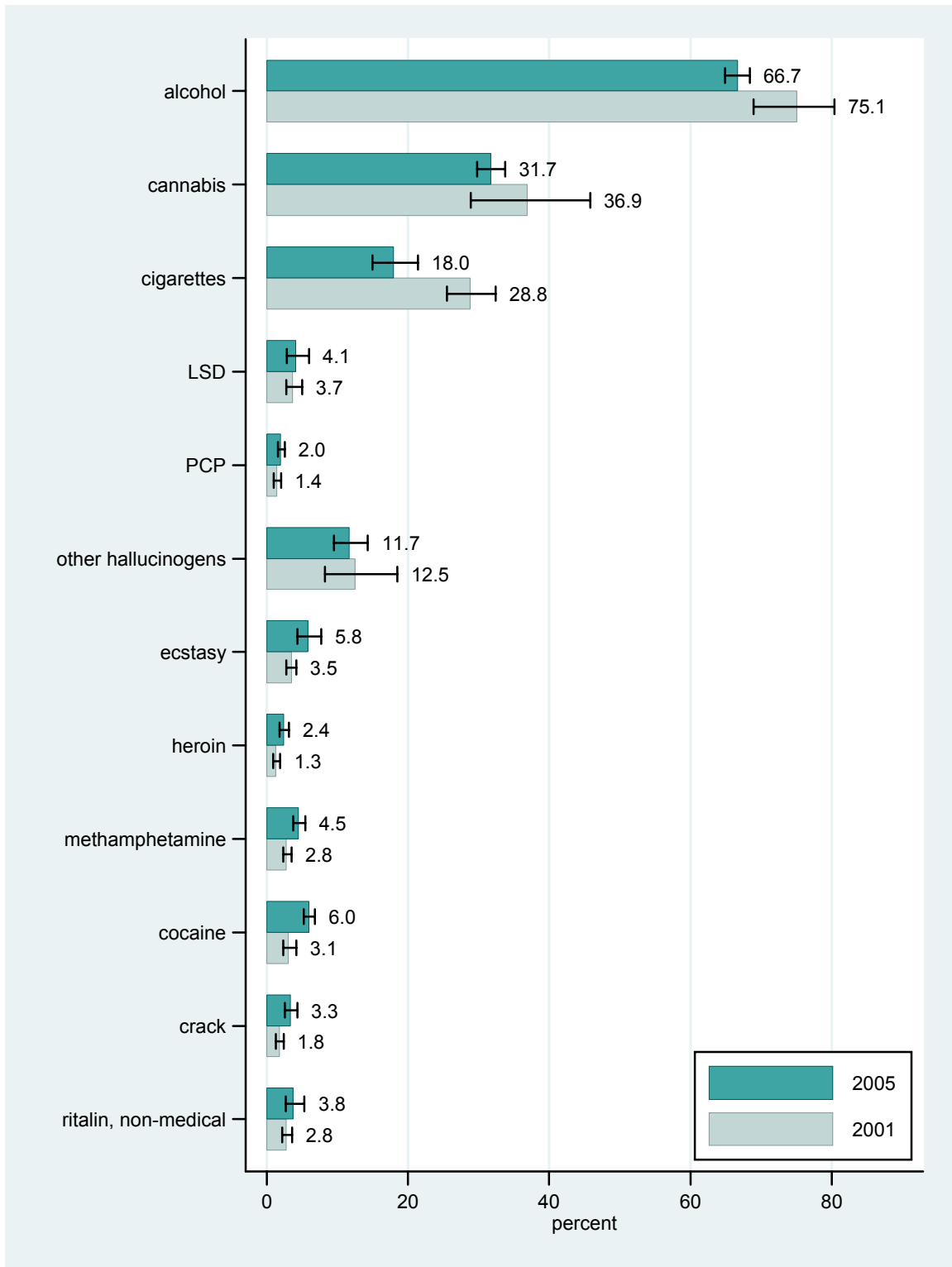
The NWOSDUS design is based on a regionally stratified, single-stage cluster sampling with schools as the primary sampling unit. Schools eligible for inclusion in the sample were elementary and secondary schools located within the Ontario Ministry of Health’s Northwestern Ontario Region who were not already chosen for the OSDUS. Excluded were private schools, special education schools (e.g., those institutionalized for correctional or health reasons), and schools on First Nations reserves. Students within those schools in grades 7 through 12 were eligible to complete the NWOSDUS.

There are some differences between the various cycles of the NWOSDUS. In 1997, the survey was conducted on students in grades 7, 9, 11 and 13. In 2001, because of the planned phase-out of OAC in Ontario was announced, we surveyed student from all grades from 7 through 13. By the time of the present survey, OAC had been eliminated so all grades from 7 through 12 were surveyed.

## **Trends from 2001 to 2005**

Past-year use of cigarettes has declined by almost 40% since 2001. This is probably in response to major initiatives at the municipal, provincial and federal levels to curb smoking in all age groups, and the attendant shift in societal attitudes towards smoking. In response

## Trends in Past-Year Student Drug Use, 2001 and 2005, Northwestern Ontario



to local concerns, we also measured students' use of smokeless tobacco in this cycle of the NWOSDUS. It currently stands at 10%.

Past-year alcohol use is down from 75.1% in 2001 to 66.7% in 2005. Cannabis use remained approximately the same from 2001 to 2005.

Following a significant drop between 1997 and 2001, LSD use has remained approximately constant at about 4% in 2005. The use of other hallucinogens also remained constant from 2001 to 2005.

Past-year use of ecstasy continued its rise. After doubling between 1997 and 2001, ecstasy use almost doubled again from 2001 to 2005, and now stands at about 6%. That six percent translates into more than a 1000 students who tried ecstasy last year.

Cocaine and crack use has historically been low among Northwestern Ontario students. However, cocaine and crack use doubled between 2001 and 2005 from 3% to 6%.

Another drug that is gaining in popularity is methamphetamine. Current past year use stands at about 4.5% for Northwestern Ontario students, having doubled since 2001. Anecdotal evidence from the Superior Points Harm Reduction Program also suggests that both methamphetamine and cocaine are becoming more common among street-involved and at-risk youth. This is a worrying trend.

## **Northwestern Ontario Compared to Ontario-wide Estimates**

In 2005, there were pronounced differences between student drug use rates in Northwestern Ontario compared to the provincial average (Note: Ontario provincial averages are from the 2005 OSDUS by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health).

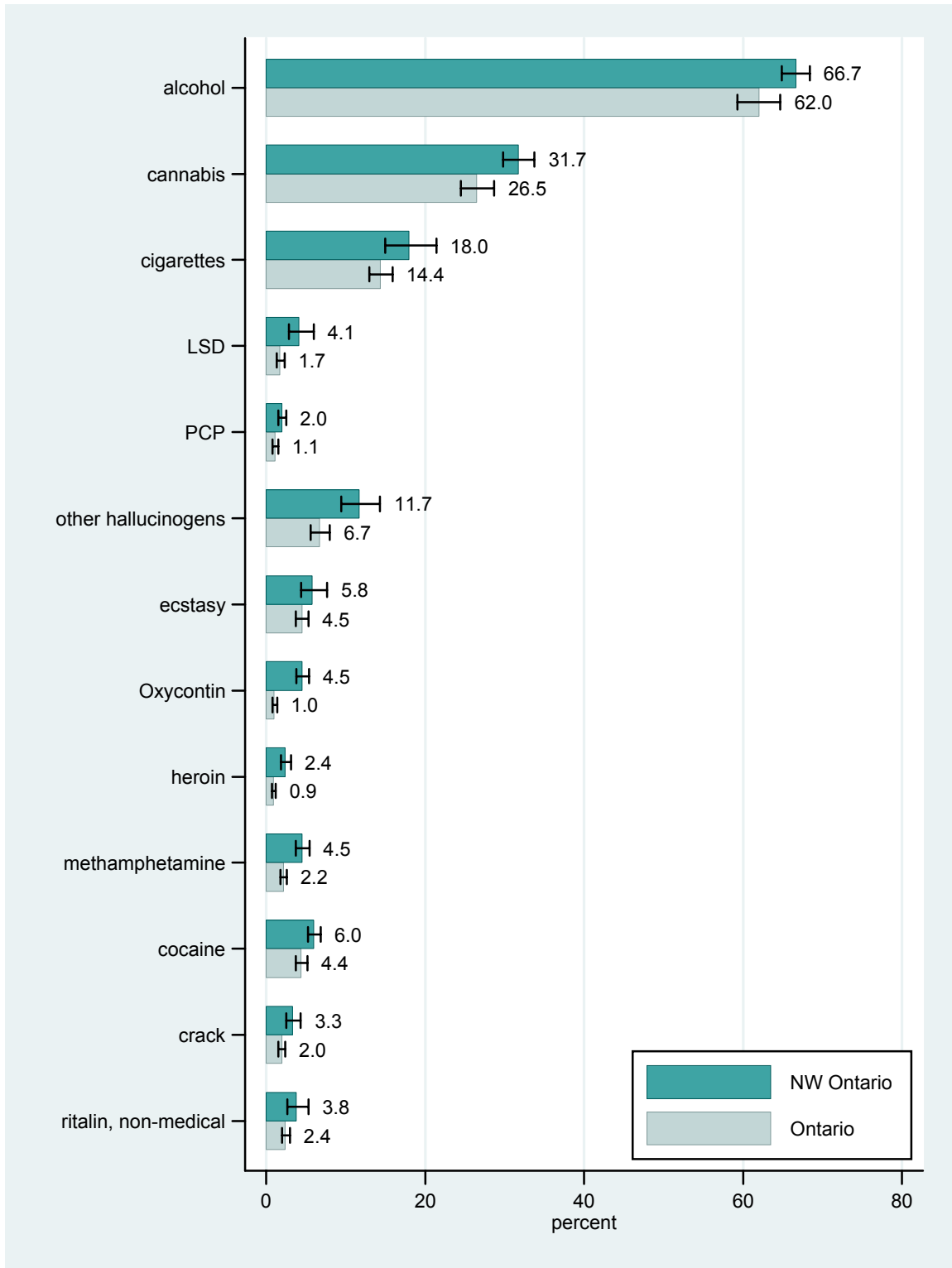
Compared with the provincial average, Northwestern Ontario students reported higher alcohol use (66.7% vs. 62%), cannabis use (31.7% vs. 26.5%), LSD use (4.1% vs. 1.7%) and other hallucinogen use (11.7% vs. 6.7%). This continues a historical trend of higher use rates of these substances in the north compared to the rest of the province.

However, while in the past Northwestern Ontario students reported substantially higher cigarette use rates, in 2005 the gap has narrowed (18% in Northwestern Ontario vs. 14.4% in Ontario).

In previous years, Northwestern Ontario students have tended to report lower use of "hard drugs" compared to province-wide estimates. However, in 2005 they reported significantly higher rates of methamphetamine (4.5% vs. 2.2%), OxyContin (4.5% vs 1%), cocaine (6% vs. 4.4%), crack (3.3% vs. 2%), and heroin (2.4% vs. 0.9%). It will be important to monitor these trends into the future.

While in the past Northwestern Ontario students reported lower ecstasy use compared with the rest of Ontario, it is now comparable (5.8% vs. 4.5%).

**Differences Between Past Year Student Drug Use in Northwestern Ontario and the rest of Ontario. Northwestern Ontario data from the NWOSSDUS, Ontario data from the OSDUS, 2005.**



## Alcohol Use

Northwestern Ontario students demonstrate a greater proclivity for alcohol use than the rest of the province. Four statistics will serve to illustrate the problem use of alcohol in Northwestern Ontario students: past year alcohol use, binge drinking, hazardous drinking, and drinking & driving.

For each of the four indicators, Northwestern Ontario students report

significantly higher and more dangerous levels of drinking than the rest of Ontario (see Table 1 below). In particular, Northwestern Ontario students are 54% more likely to report binge drinking in the last four weeks, 76% more likely to report hazardous drinking, and 84% more likely to report drinking & driving.

**Table 1. Alcohol indicators demonstrating problematic levels of drinking in Northwestern Ontario, 2005.**

	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Northwestern Ontario</b>	<b>Ontario</b>
<b>Past year alcohol use</b>	Had at least one drink in past year	66.7 (64.9-68.4)	62.0 (59.3-64.7)
<b>Binge drinking</b>	Had 5+ drinks on one occasion in the last 4 weeks	34.9 (32.0, 37.8)	22.7 (20.4-25.2)
<b>Hazardous drinking</b>	Scores 8+ points on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)*	28.0 (25.7-30.4)	15.9 (13.6-18.5)
<b>Drinking &amp; Driving</b>	Driving within one hour of having 2+ drinks, grades 10-12 with drivers license	25.0 (19.6-31.3)	13.6 (11.8-15.6)

\* The AUDIT is a scale developed by the World Health Organization. Scoring 8 or higher on the scale indicates *hazardous drinking*, which indicates a pattern of drinking that increases the likelihood of future medical and physical problems, including accident



