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Thirty Year Trends in Tobacco and Cannabis Use Among Ontario Youth

After alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are the most commonly used drugs by youth in Canada.¹ Numerous studies have found that adolescents who smoke cigarettes are significantly more likely to use cannabis than those who do not smoke.^{2,3} Additionally, cannabis use has been linked with significant increases in the risk of tobacco use onset and nicotine dependence in adolescents and young adults.^{4,5} Currently, most prevention efforts focus on single rather than multi-substance prevention despite the clustering of risk behaviours.

KEY FINDING:

Tobacco and cannabis use among Ontario students has fluctuated considerably over the past 30 years with reported co-use of tobacco and cannabis varying between 8% and 18%

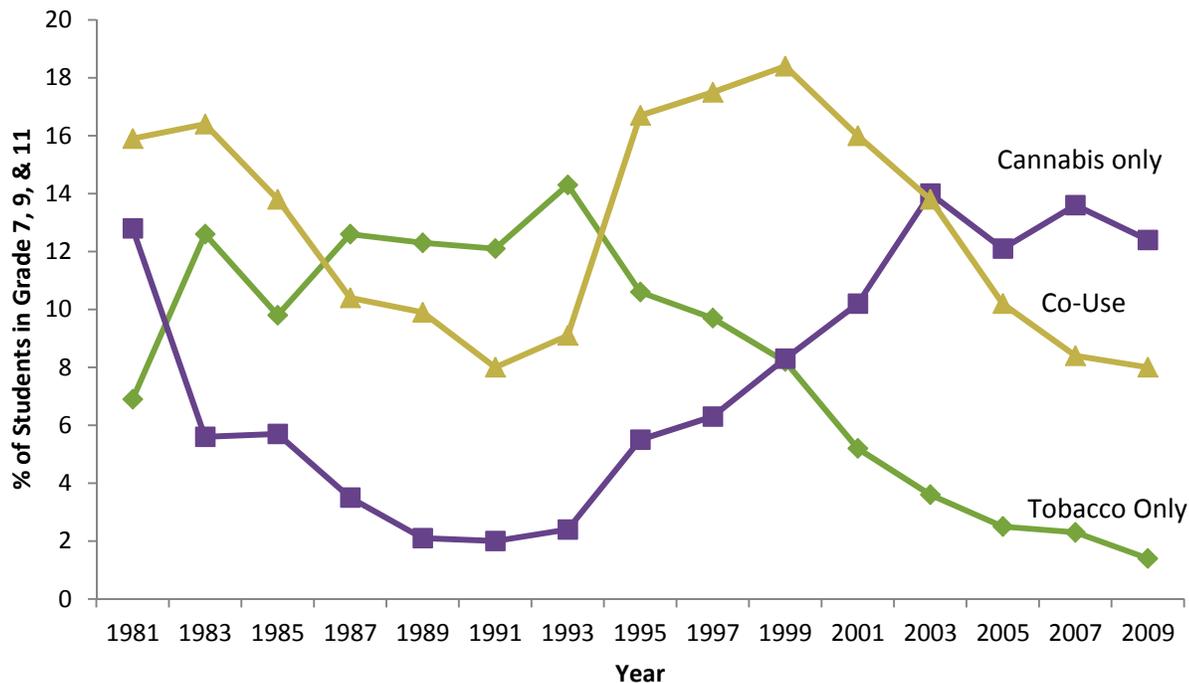
This update presents data on the use and co-use of tobacco and cannabis among students over the past three decades using the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS). OSDUHS is the longest ongoing school survey in Canada, and the second longest in North America.

For this study, a co-user was defined as one who reported both tobacco use and cannabis use in the past year. Tobacco only and cannabis only users were defined as reporting past year use of one of these substances with no past year use of the other substance. Mulling (mixing of tobacco with cannabis) is not captured in this definition of co-use. Trends of co-use were analyzed over the period 1981-2009. Differences in trends were tested using logistic regression.

Tobacco and Cannabis Use from 1981–2009

- The prevalence of tobacco only use, cannabis only use, and co-use among students in Ontario fluctuated considerably over the past three decades (Figure 1).
- In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were more tobacco only users than co-users and cannabis only users. Since that time, tobacco only use has decreased dramatically, while cannabis only use and co-use have increased.
- The prevalence of co-use peaked in 1999 at 18.4% (95% CI: 16.5, 20.3%), a time when prevalence of overall use of tobacco and cannabis were at their highest.
- The late 1990s and early 2000s marked an important turning point, with cannabis only use surpassing tobacco only use for the first time since 1981.
- In 2007, cannabis only use was significantly greater than co-use for the first time in the past three decades.
- Tobacco only use reached an all-time low of 1.4% (95% CI: 0.9, 1.9%) in 2009.

Figure 1: Prevalence of tobacco only users, cannabis only users, and co-users among students in Ontario, 1981–2009, OSDUHS



Conclusion

The prevalence of co-use of tobacco and cannabis among youth in Ontario has fluctuated between approximately 8% and 18% over the past three decades. These results, along with other evidence that health risk behaviours among youth often co-occur,^{6,7} highlight the need for multi-substance prevention programming. In particular, these findings emphasize the importance of prevention programs that focus on informing youth of the health risks involved in the use of both tobacco and cannabis.

References

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