

Ethnoracial background makes a difference in predicting cannabis use among Ontario students

What is this research about?

Although there is a lot of research on youth and cannabis use, most do not consider immigration and ethnoracial background. Those studies that examine these factors tend to involve small group samples that do not reflect Ontario's diverse population. For these reasons, it is important to utilize large samples to examine whether these groups have different health risk behaviours, to inform the development of effective and targeted prevention efforts.

In this study, Ontario researchers looked at whether Ontario high school students' use of cannabis vary by their ethnoracial background and whether they are foreign-born or native-born.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers used data from the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health survey (OSDUHS), a cross-sectional survey that has taken place every two years since 1977.

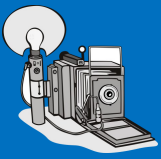
It is a representative and province-wide survey of students in Grades 7 through 12 in publicly-funded schools that examines substance use, gambling, delinquent behaviour, and mental and physical health. For this study, the researchers used data from the 2011 and 2013 survey and only looked at students in Grades 9-12.

What you need to know

In Ontario, youth who are South Asian or East/Southeast Asian have lower odds of using cannabis than those who are of White, Black, or mixed race. However, youth who are of mixed race, have higher odds of cannabis use compared to youth who are White. Foreign-born youth were also less likely to use cannabis than native-born youth in Canada, although this varies for different ethnoracial groups. Greater knowledge of diverse populations and the complex factors related to ethnoracial background are needed to predict use of cannabis among youth.

What did the researchers find?

Students of South Asian or East/Southeast Asian backgrounds had lower odds of using cannabis than those of White, Black, or mixed race (White and another ethnoracial group). However, youth of mixed race had higher odds of using cannabis compared to White youth. Black students were not significantly different from White, Latino, and mixed-race students in terms of cannabis use in the 12 months before they took part in the



survey. Foreign-born students also had lower odds of using cannabis than students born in Canada, but this also varied for some foreign-born youth, depending on their ethnoracial background.

How can you use this research?

This study is particularly important in light of the current cannabis legalization landscape in Canada. Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug among youth in Ontario, and with the province having the highest proportion of foreign-born residents in the country, it is important to understand the factors that predict its use among youth.

Limitations and next steps

The limitations of this study include the broad categorizations of ethnoracial backgrounds examined. A larger sample size could show more detailed interactions between immigrant status, ethnoracial background, and cannabis use. In addition, the survey looks only at students in publicly-funded schools, so it does not provide a look at cannabis use among students in private and other types of schools.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Adolescents, cannabis use, ethnicity, immigrant status, race, youth

This *Research Snapshot* responds to the need for evidence related to “School-based interventions for prevention, promotion, and early intervention (including suicide prevention)” and “How to best support vulnerable and at-risk youth”. These evidence needs were identified during dialogues for EENet’s Sharing Together initiative and fall under the following evidence priorities, “Children and youth, including transition-age youth,” and “Prevention and promotion, including suicide prevention.” To learn more about Sharing Together, which resulted in an evidence priority agenda for Ontario’s mental health, substance use, and addictions system, visit eenet.ca/initiatives/Sharing.