

# YUKON ADDICTIONS SURVEY (YAS) PRELIMINARY RESULTS 2005

A survey of Yukoners' use of alcohol and other drugs



The Yukon Addictions Survey is a joint project of the Yukon Government's Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Bureau of Statistics.

This report presents selected, preliminary figures from the 2005 Yukon Addictions Survey (YAS). Future publications will provide a detailed account of YAS results.

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## The Yukon Addictions Survey 2005 - Highlights Report

This survey is Yukon's portion of a national survey dedicated to assessing the prevalence of non-medical drug use. Since the 1990 *Yukon Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey*, there has been no other sample survey dedicated to monitoring the extent to which the population uses alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. Some questions about drug use—particularly about alcohol and tobacco—have been included in other national studies, but this is the first time in nearly 15 years that a population survey has focused on the non-medical, psychoactive use of alcohol and other drugs.

The Yukon Addiction Survey (YAS) is comparable to the Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS). For the most part, the questions in the Yukon survey are identical to those in the CAS. As a result of field testing in Yukon, some items in the CAS have been eliminated and some items have been added to the YAS in order to best reflect Yukon's experience.

Yukon's survey is really two surveys:

1. A household survey conducted by telephone of a systematically and randomly-generated population sample of 1240 respondents.
2. A strategic sample of people thought to be at particularly high risk of experiencing harmful consequences of drug use. Respondents to this section of the study were recruited from downtown Whitehorse, including some street corners, a soup kitchen, the Salvation Army and a skateboard park. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face and received coupons for Subway as a gesture of appreciation (N=75).

## Findings

The results of the Yukon Addictions Survey suggest that, for the most part, differences between Yukon and the rest of Canada are minor regarding the use of alcohol and other drug use. According to this first analysis of the data, a major difference is that Yukon's rate of cannabis use is higher than that of Canada.

Since the last alcohol and drugs survey in 1990, there has been an increase in light drinking and a decrease in heavy, frequent drinking, indicating that more people are adopting alcohol use styles where the likelihood of negative consequences is lower. The rate of tobacco use has decreased substantially, but cannabis use has increased since the 1990 survey.

Yukoners report that they have considerable access to illicit drugs, but there is little indication that, with the exception of cannabis, they are taking advantage of that access. For the general population, use levels of illicit drugs other than cannabis are very low. A perhaps surprising result of the current analysis is that Yukoners who live in rural areas report greater access to illicit drugs than those who live in urban areas.

The majority of Yukoners who use any non-medical drug will use only alcohol. Less frequent, but also common, are multidrug use patterns involving alcohol, tobacco and cannabis. As was mentioned, rates of use of other drugs are not frequent in the general Yukon population.

It is not uncommon to be affected by other people's use of alcohol and drugs. Close to half of the Yukon population reported having been negatively affected in some way—mainly through verbal harassment or insults—by someone who has drunk too much or has taken drugs.

Because it is difficult to capture data on problem use in a general population survey, the Bureau of Statistics conducted a strategic survey of high-risk respondents. These respondents had higher rates of use of all drugs with the exception of alcohol, where the proportion of users was similar to that of the general population. Regarding their drug use, outstanding and perhaps most problematic were their high rates of heavy drinking and their high rates of cocaine use. Not surprisingly, access to most drugs for this group was high, and a very large majority of this group reported easy access to cocaine. Also of concern were the large proportions of those reporting victimization of all kinds from others who were drinking or who were using drugs.

## Highlights of findings

### Alcohol Use

- 79% of Yukoners over the age of 15 reported the use of alcohol in the past 12 months, the same number for Canadians overall. This compares to 77% in 1990 who reported using alcohol in the past 12 months, an increase of 2%. 81% of Yukoners in the high risk population reported using alcohol in the past 12 months.
- The likelihood of using alcohol during the 12 months preceding the survey was higher for Yukon males who live in urban areas. Males between the ages of 25-44 and 45-64 had the highest rates of drinking. In the high risk population it was more likely that they were a male in the 15-24 yr age group.
- The majority of Yukoners in the general population reported light alcohol usage with an even number of respondents reporting light-frequent (31%) and light-infrequent (31%) use in the past 12 months. In 1990 there was 27% who reported light-frequent and 28% light-infrequent alcohol use. Heavy frequent alcohol usage was 10% in 2005, down 4% from 14% who reported heavy frequent drinking in 1990.
- 16% of Yukoners who had consumed alcohol in the past year also reported smoking cigarettes while 9% reported using alcohol and cannabis in the past 12 months, and 7% reported using alcohol, tobacco and cannabis in combination. In the high risk population in Yukon, 11% reported using tobacco and alcohol together, 14% reported using tobacco, alcohol and cannabis, and 11% combined tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and cocaine.
- On average, Yukoners consumed 3.8 drinks per occasion, which compares to 4.2 drinks in 1990. The high risk population reported 10.4 drinks per occasion in the 2005 survey. The reported drinking occasions per month for Yukon's general population was 6.7 per month compared to 6.5 per month in 1990. The high risk population reported 11.9 drinking occasion in a month.

### Illicit Drug Use

- 21% of Yukoners over the age of 15 reported using cannabis in the past 12 months, compared to 14% of Canadians overall. In 1990 there was 16% who reported using cannabis in the past 12 months. 74% of Yukoners in the high risk population reported using cannabis in the past 12 months.
- Over the past 12 months usage of other illicit drugs for Yukoners reported shows 3% used cocaine, 1% used hallucinogenic drugs and 1% used ecstasy. These numbers are in line for similar usage of drugs in the Canadian population overall. In the high risk population 40% used cocaine, 18% used hallucinogenic drugs, 16% used ecstasy and 7% used methamphetamines (amphetamines, speed).

## Highlights of findings

- The likelihood of using cannabis during the 12 months preceding the survey was higher for Yukoners in the general population between the ages of 25-44, male and living in urban areas. In the high risk population it was also more likely that they were a male in the 15-24 yr age group.
- 96% of Yukoners in the high risk population reported it is easy to get marijuana when they want to, and 82% report it is easy to get cocaine. In the general population 77% reported it is easy to get marijuana while 51% reported it is easy to get access to cocaine.
- Most users of cannabis in the general population are between the ages of 15-24, are male and live in an urban area. The main users in the high risk population are between 15-24 and male.

### Multiple Drug Use

- For 43% of Yukoners, alcohol is the only drug used. There are 16% who use alcohol and tobacco together, while 26% of Yukoners use two or more licit or illicit drugs together such as using tobacco, alcohol and cannabis. The high risk group also used drugs in combination together, in fact, 88% had used two or more illicit drugs during the year prior to the survey.

### Availability

- Access to drugs as reported in the Yukon 2005 survey illustrates that many Yukoners find it relatively easy to access drugs. 77% of the respondents in the survey said that cannabis is 'fairly easy or 'very easy' to get, while 51% said the same for cocaine. For the high risk sample access to drugs was more common and overall higher for most drugs, 96% said that cannabis is 'fairly easy or 'very easy' to get and 82% said cocaine is easy to get.

### Harms

- Yukoners have experienced harm as a result of someone else using alcohol or drugs. 31% said they have been insulted or harassed as a result of another person's drinking while 71% of the high risk group said they had been insulted or harassed. While 19% of the general population reported being pushed or shoved, 64% of the high risk group had this experience.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Alcohol and Other Drug Use in the Past Year, age 15+ (CAS 2004, YAS 2005)**

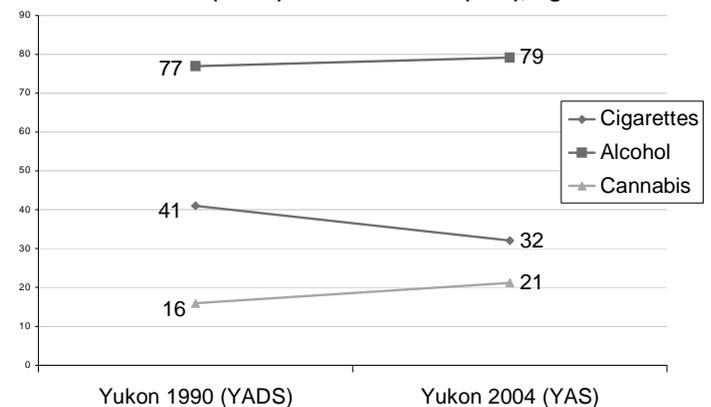
	Cigarettes*	Alcohol	Cannabis	Cocaine	Methamphetamine	Ecstasy	Hallucinogens
Canada	23	79	14	2	1	1	1
Yukon - general	28	79	21	3	S	1 Q	1 Q
Newfoundland	24	74	12	1 Q	S	1 Q	S
P.E.I.	24	70	11	1 Q	S	1 Q	1 Q
Nova Scotia	24	76	14	1 Q	S	1 Q	1 Q
New Brunswick	25	74	11	S	1 Q	S	S
Quebec	26	82	16	3 Q	2 Q	1 Q	1 Q
Ontario	22	79	12	1 Q	S	1 Q	S
Manitoba	23	77	13	2 Q	S	S	1 Q
Saskatchewan	24	78	11	2 Q	S	1 Q	1 Q
Alberta	23	80	15	2	S	1 Q	1 Q
B.C.	19	79	17	3	1 Q	1 Q	1 Q
Yukon – high risk	75	81	74	40	7	16	18
1990 YADS**	41	77	16	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

The proportions of current drinkers for Yukon and Canada are identical at 79%, and the rates of cocaine users are comparable (3 versus 2%). Cannabis use in Yukon is considerably higher than use in provinces (21% versus 14%), while the rates of the use of other drugs for both Yukon and Canada are so low that any comparisons of statistics for speed, ecstasy, and hallucinogens would not be valid. Compared with respondents to the Yukon and Canada population surveys, those in the high risk groups have far higher rates of cannabis (74%) and cocaine use (40%).

Figure 2 displays rates of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis use by the Yukon population in 1990 and 2005. According to these surveys, the proportion of the population who drinks alcohol has remained fairly stable, with 77% of the population having reported current drinking in 1990, and 79%, in 2005. Tobacco use has declined from 41% to 28%, while cannabis use has risen from 16% to 21% during the 15 year period.

In contrast with the respondents in the population samples in Yukon and Canada, the exposure of the high risk group to the three drugs in question is far greater than for the general population samples. While their prevalence of alcohol use is similar to that of the population samples, a large majority has had cannabis, and 40% has used cocaine during the year prior to the survey. It should be noted that this high risk group is remarkable compared with the population groups. Their rates of illicit drug use are as high as they are because this sample was selected to enable a thorough examination of problem drinking and illicit drug use; such an examination is not possible in population samples, because (as is evident from the low rates of use of most illicit drugs) low counts do not permit valid analysis.

**Figure 2: Rates of Alcohol, Tobacco and Cannabis Use, Yukon 1990 (YADS) and Yukon 2005 (YAS), Age 15+**



In addition to the use of alcohol, cannabis and cocaine, the high risk sample has been exposed to other drugs in substantial proportions during the past year.

Q Qualified release due to high sampling variability

S Estimate suppressed due to unacceptably high sampling variability

Estimates for heroin, inhalants, and steroids were not presented due to unacceptably high sampling variability

\* Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) 2003

\*\*YADS (Yukon Alcohol and Drug Survey), 1990, Yukon Bureau of Statistics

**Patterns of Alcohol Use**

The majority of Canadians and Yukoners drink alcohol. Therefore, it is important to assess the way in which alcohol is used and the consequences of alcohol use. Most people who use alcohol do so without permanent, harmful consequences. Likewise, most occasions during which alcohol is used are benign occasions. However, heavier drinking, or consuming high quantities of alcohol on a given occasion, contributes considerably to physical, mental and social damage. Given the negative consequences associated with heavier drinking, assessment of drinking patterns, or the combination of quantity and frequency of alcohol use, can aid in informing the direction of social policy.

**Figure 3: Drinking status, Yukon 2005 (YAS), Yukon1990 (YADS) and Canada 2004 (CAS), Age15+, Past 12 months**

Status	1990 YADS	2005 YAS General	2005 YAS High Risk	2004 CAS	Definition
Abstainer	4%	10%	7%	7%	Never had alcohol beyond sips or tastes.
Former	19%	10%	17%	14%	Drank sometime during their lives but not during the 12 months preceding the survey
Current	77%	79%	77%	79%	Drank during the 12 months preceding the survey

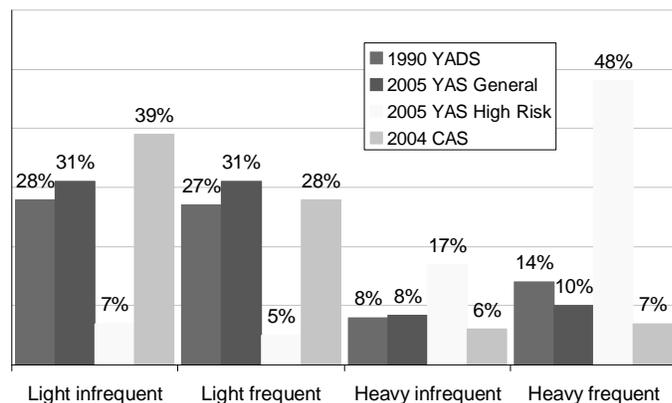
**Drinking status of Current Drinkers, Yukon 2005 (YAS), Yukon1990 (YADS) and Canada 2004 (CAS), Age15+, Past 12 months**

Status	1990 YADS	2005 YAS General	2005 YAS High Risk	2004 CAS	Definition
Light infrequent	28%	31%	7%	39%	Current Drinkers who drink less often than once a week usually fewer than five drinks when alcohol is used
Light frequent	27%	31%	5%	28%	Current Drinkers who drink once a week or more usually fewer than five drinks when alcohol is used
Heavy infrequent	8%	8%	17%	6%	Current Drinkers who drink less often than once a week usually five drinks or more drinks when alcohol is use
Heavy frequent	14%	10%	48%	7%	Current Drinkers who drink once a week or more usually five drinks or more drinks when alcohol is used

Figure 3 displays the proportions of respondents in the different drinking status categories for Yukon, general population in 1990 and the two recent population surveys in Yukon (general and high risk) and Canada.

The majority of people in Yukon and in Canada are in the light drinking categories: they drink smaller amounts of alcohol either frequently or infrequently. Yukon has somewhat less light, infrequent drinkers than does the rest of Canada (31% versus 39%).

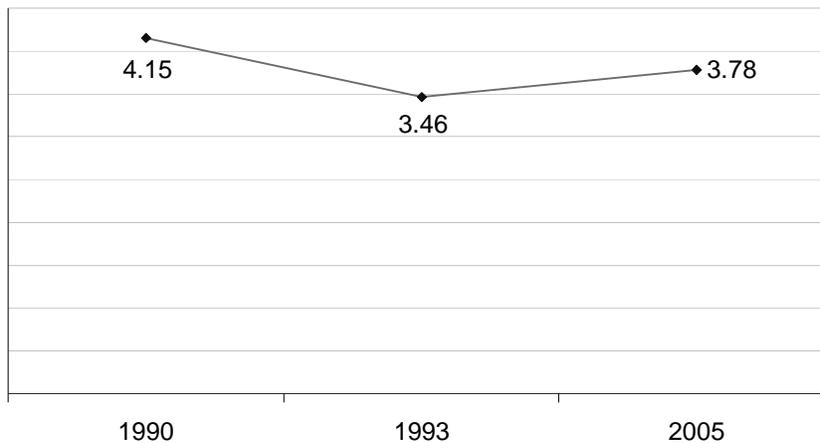
**Figure 4: Drinking Status in Year Preceding Survey**



Since 1990, there may have been an increase in the proportion of lighter drinkers, indicating that more people are using alcohol in a benign manner.

One fifth of Yukoners (20%) and those living in the provinces (20%) do not drink. Canada has slightly less life abstainers than does Yukon (7% versus 10%) and more people who once drank, but no longer have alcohol (14% versus 10%). The proportion of life abstainers has increased since 1990, and that of former drinkers has decreased. The rate of heavy drinking is somewhat higher in Yukon than in Canada (18% versus 13%). The data from the two Yukon surveys suggest that heavy frequent drinking—the highest risk kind of drinking—has decreased since 1990 by 4%.

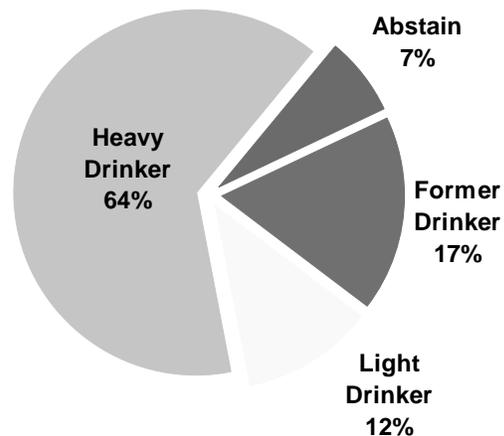
**Figure 5 : Mean Number of Drinks per Occasion in Yukon 1990, 1993\* and 2005, Current Drinkers, Age 15+**



An important component of the drinking status measure just discussed is the usual number of drinks on an occasion, as this differentiates heavy from lighter drinkers, and heavier drinkers are at greater risk of harm. Figure 5 illustrates changes in this measure for three time points: 1990, 1993, and 2005. Yukoners reported a higher average number of drinks in 1990 than they did in 1993 and 2005. The current survey indicates a rise in this average from 1993.

The high risk sample has a very different distribution of drinking pattern categories. The chart below suggests that the heavy drinking pattern is a usual one for this group.

**Figure 6: Drinking Pattern for Yukon High Risk Group, 2005**



Clear from this chart is that, whatever other drugs are being used by this group, alcohol is of concern, as, when most of these people drink, they drink heavily. This group also contains a higher proportion of former drinkers than does the Yukon population sample. Current drinkers in this sample reported that their usual number of drinks on their drinking occasions was the average of 10.4; this is close to three times the average amount reported by numbers of the general population sample.

\*1993 Yukon Health Promotion Survey (YHPS)

### Illicit Drug Use

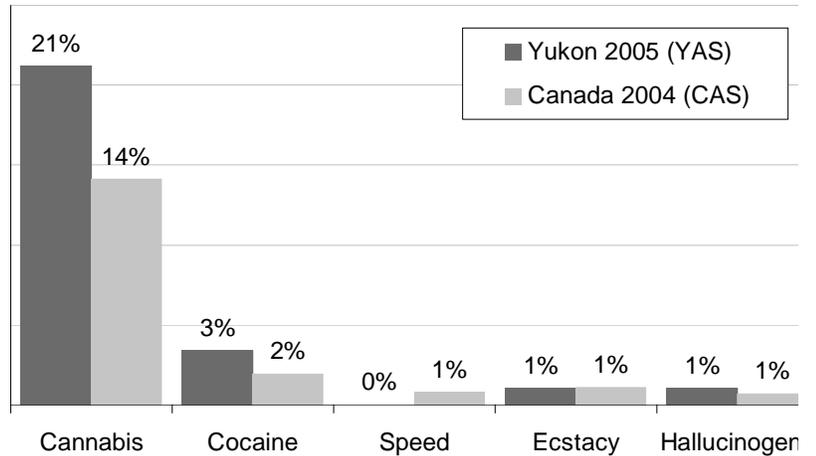
Respondents were questioned about their experiences with illicit drugs: whether or not access to them was easy or difficult, whether or not they were exposed to these drugs, and whether or not they were harmed by the use of these drugs.

Yukon reported numbers similar to the rest of Canada for illicit drugs such as cocaine (3%), speed (1%), ecstasy (1%) and hallucinogens (1%).

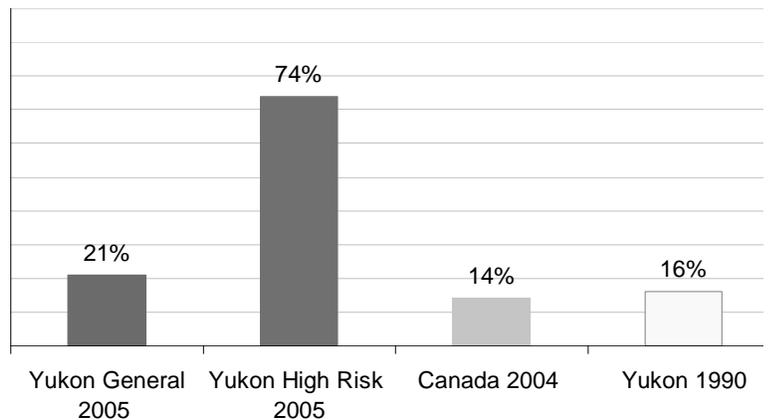
Cannabis use has risen from 16% to 21% from the 1990 Yukon survey to 2005 and is the highest in Canada for the past year. British Columbia has the next highest reported percentage in Canadian provinces (17%), for the past year. Rates in the high risk population are much higher than the general population in the Yukon for reported use of cannabis in the past 12 months (74%).

The majority of cannabis users in the general population (42%) are between the ages of 25-44 while 56% of users in the high risk population are between the ages of 15-24. The split between males (53%) and female users (47%) in the general population is closer than the split between males and females in the high risk population.

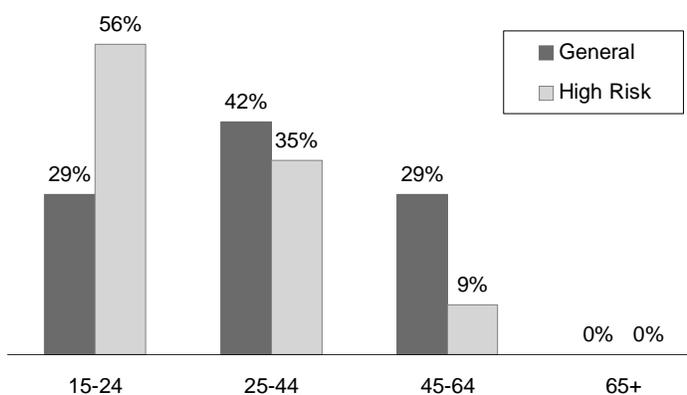
**Figure 7: Illicit Drug Use in the Past 12 months, Yukon 2005 (YAS) and Canada 2004 (CAS), Age 15+**



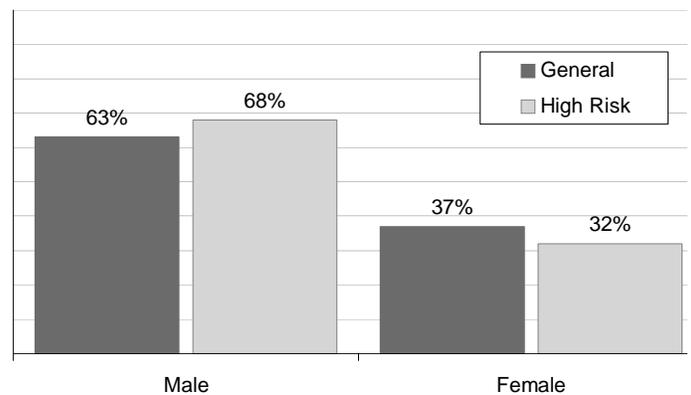
**Figure 8: Percentage of Cannabis Use, Yukon 2005, Canada, 2004 and Yukon 1990, in the Past Year, Age 15+**



**Figure 9: Cannabis Use, Past Year, General and High Risk Populations, broken down by age, Yukon 2005 (YAS)**



**Figure 10: Cannabis Use, Past Year, General and High Risk Populations, broken down by gender, Yukon 2005 (YAS)**



### Availability of Illicit Drugs

The use of drugs is largely dependent upon accessibility. Components of accessibility include the price and scope of distribution. First, however, knowledge of where and how to acquire a drug is necessary to its use, and this knowledge differs according to the drug itself, and is differentially distributed in populations. For each drug, respondents were asked whether it was “probably impossible,” “very difficult,” “fairly difficult,” “fairly easy” or “very easy” for them to get that drug. Figure 11 displays the proportions of the Yukon population who reported it was easy to acquire the drug.

It is not surprising that the drug with the greatest proportion of ease of acquisition is solvents/glue, as this is not a controlled substance. Of the illicit drugs, over three quarters (77%) of the population report that marijuana is easy to get, and half of Yukoners (51%) claim that that cocaine or crack can be gotten with ease. Substantial proportions of the population (30% to 43%) report that it is easy to get ecstasy, hallucinogens, methamphetamine, and heroin, in that order. In general, and for the population as a whole, substantial proportions are able to obtain all of the drugs listed here.

**Figure 11: Percentage of Respondents Reporting it is "fairly easy" or "very easy" to Get Drugs in Rural and Urban Areas, Yukon 2005, Age 15+**

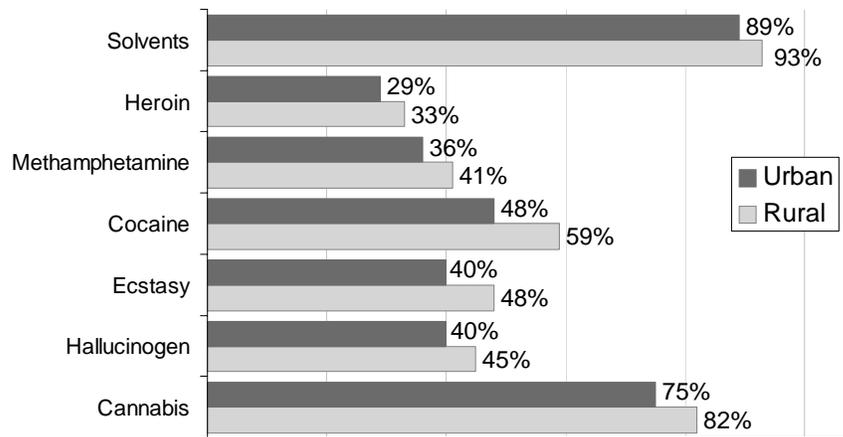
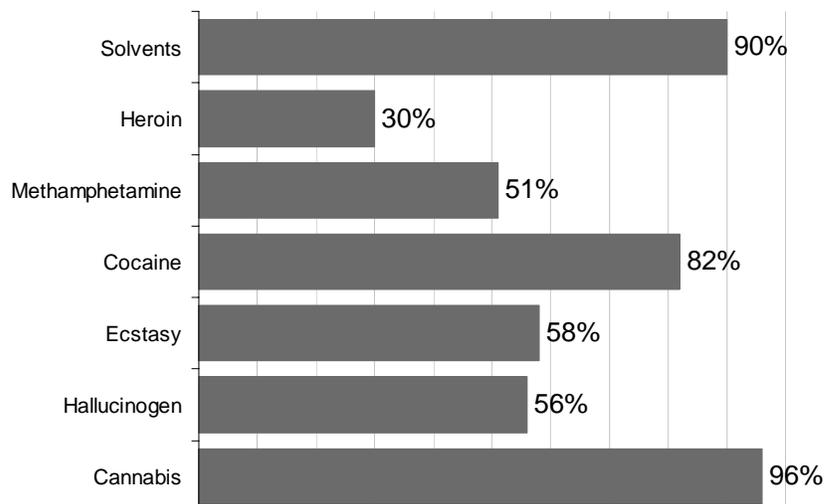


Figure 11 depicts rates of claiming it is fairly easy or easy to get drugs in rural and in urban areas.

Consistently—and in the case of cocaine/crack with an 11% difference—rates of ease of acquisition were reported to be higher in the rural than in the urban areas.

Members of the high risk group are members of social groups where illicit drug use is more common and where availability would be expected to be higher than that of the general population. Almost all members of this group (96%) report that it is easy to get marijuana, and 82% find it easy to get cocaine or crack, as well.

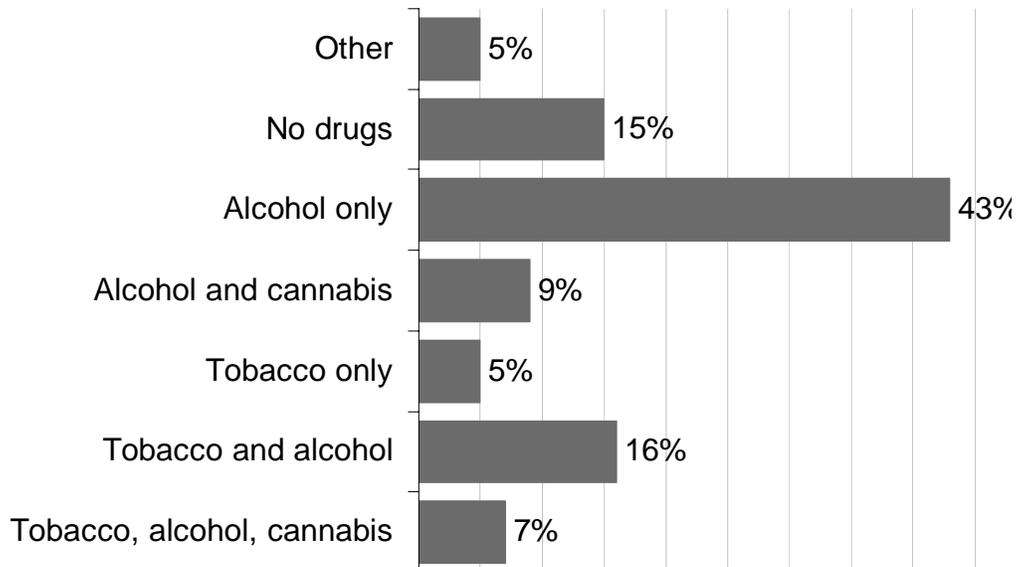
**Figure 12: Percentage of Respondents Reporting it is "fairly easy" or "very easy" to Get Drugs, Yukon 2005, Age 15+, High Risk**



## Multiple Drug Use

When drugs are used, it is common to use more than one drug. For example, it is fairly common to use both tobacco and alcohol; tobacco users rarely abstain from alcohol use. When illicit drugs are used, it is common to use at least one other licit or illicit drug.

**Figure 13: Yukoners and Drug Use Patterns in Percentages, Yukon 2005 (YAS), Age 15+**



For nearly half of Yukoners (43%), alcohol is the only non-medical drug that is used. Fifteen percent of the population aged 15 and over uses no drugs and 16% uses alcohol and tobacco. One in five Yukoners (21%) uses some illicit drug in addition to another licit or illicit drug.

Drug use patterns for the high risk group do not cluster in the same way as for the general population. Twenty-three percent of this sample does not use illicit drugs, and 88% has used two or more licit and illicit substances during the year prior to the survey.

The most common combinations of drug use are:

Tobacco and alcohol: 11%

Tobacco, alcohol and cannabis: 14%

Tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and cocaine: 11%.

There were also just under 5% of the high risk population who had not used alcohol, cigarettes or any illicit drugs in the year prior to the survey.

### Harm as a Result of Alcohol and other Drug Use

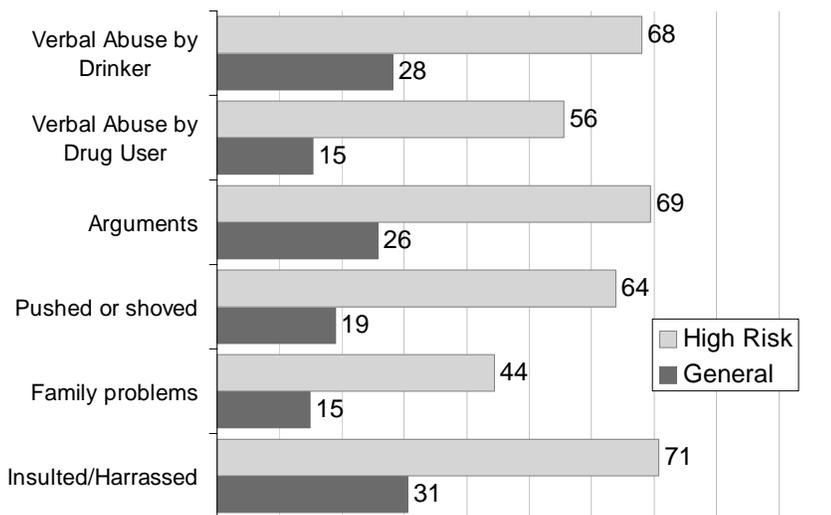
The Yukon Addictions Survey has a section on victimization and asked whether or not the respondent had been harmed by another person's drinking or drug use during the past 12 months. Specific types of harm included in the survey are:

- Being insulted or harassed
- Having family problems
- Being pushed or shoved
- Having arguments due to the drinking or drug use of another person.

In addition, there were two items querying whether verbal abuse had occurred by:

- A drug user or
- A drinker

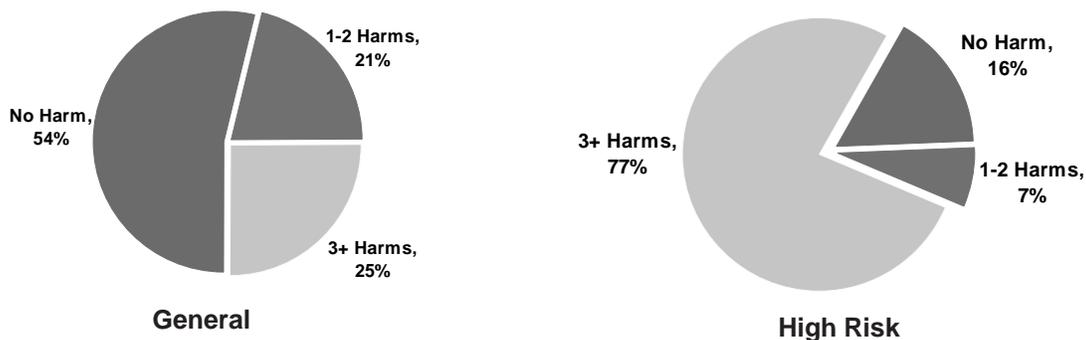
**Figure 14: Percentages of Population and High Risk Respondents Reporting Specific Types of Harm during the Past 12 Months. Yukon 2005, Age 15+**



A considerable proportion of Yukoners are currently harmed by the behaviour of others which may have been caused or made more severe through the use of alcohol or other drugs. The data also suggest that some victimization by people who drink too much or use drugs is not uncommon, with close to a third of the population reporting insults, harassment or verbal abuse.

The contrast between the general population and the high risk samples in rates of all harm suggests that respondents in the high risk sample live their lives in a milieu where drug- and alcohol-affected disturbing behaviour is the rule, rather than the exception. A comparison between the two samples in terms of the number of different types of harm experienced in the past 12 months illustrates this point further.

**Figure 15: Percentages of Yukon and High Risk Samples Reporting No Harm, 1-2 Types of Harm, and 3+ Types of Harm During the Past Year. Yukon 2005, Age 15+**



While a majority of the general population reported experiencing no harm from others who drank or took drugs during the past year, a large majority of the high risk sample reported having been victimized through three or more types of harm by someone who drank or used drugs.