

# The Community Health Reporter

From the Community Health & Well-Being: A Resource for Planning Report  
Volume 1, Issue 3

## Did you know . . .

Youth in Southwestern Ontario have problems with:

- Delinquency
- Drugs and alcohol
- Depression
- STDs and pregnancies

## What do these factors have to do with health?

As a group, youth are physically healthy. They have lived through early childhood and are many years away from the diseases associated with aging. **Threats to youth's health come mostly from their behaviour.** Drinking and driving, involvement in violence, early and unprotected sex and drug abuse create immediate threats; use of tobacco, poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles can lead to health problems in later years.

These behaviours are reflected in the causes of death among youth aged 10-19. The number one cause of death for Southwestern Ontario youth is injury, resulting primarily from motor vehicle injuries, suicide, fires and drownings.

### Delinquency

The percentage of students reporting certain delinquent acts at least once in 1993 was higher in Southwestern Ontario (SWO) than in any other Ontario region, including Toronto. Some examples are:

	SWO	Toronto
Assault:	18.6%	11.6%
Auto Theft:	11.2%	8.9%
More than 1 Delinq. Act:	49.2%	40.4% ➤



## Your health & tomorrow's health care system

**Fact:** A high number of Southwestern Ontario youth report engaging in high-risk behaviours.

**Situation:** These behaviours compromise their health both in the present and the future, thus increasing their personal health care costs. In turn, these behaviours affect Southwestern Ontario overall, by increasing the need for police protection, and raising health care and educational expenses. In addition, it has been shown that members of communities with higher rates of crime, delinquency and family violence are at significantly greater risk for chronic disease.

**Solution:** To prevent health problems, people need a sense of well-being in a safe community with supportive people. Youth in particular are "protected" against many health risks by a sense of connectedness with parents, family, and their school environment, and by their own attitudes, beliefs and experiences, which are in turn shaped by their environment. As a community, we need to work together to provide our youth with the right tools to become productive members of society.

However, more Londoners assume Toronto has greater problems: 46.3% of Londoners believed Metro Toronto would have the highest student delinquency rates in Ontario, while only 20.4% believed SWO would.

## Drugs & Alcohol

The percentage of students reporting substance use at least once in 1993 was higher in Southwestern Ontario (SWO) than in any other Ontario region, including Toronto, for most substances. Some examples are:

	<u>SWO</u>	<u>Toronto</u>
Tobacco	28.4%	21.6%
Alcohol	64.8%	50.5%
Cannabis (Marijuana)	16.1%	9.3%
LSD	11.6%	3.1%
Having an alcohol problem	7.2%	2.4%
Having a drug problem	2.7%	0.8%

In contrast, 59.3% of Londoners thought Metro Toronto would have a higher rate of student drug use, while only 12.0% thought Southwestern Ontario would.

## Other health-compromising factors

- 11.5% of Southwestern Ontario students reported feeling **depressed** often or **always**, compared to 5.6% of Toronto students.
- Southwestern Ontario, and in particular London, has a higher proportion of secondary school students with **special educational needs** (learning, mental and/or physical disabilities) than Ontario as a whole:

	<u>Cases/1,000 Students</u>
London Board of Education	104.0
Southwestern Ontario	89.9
Ontario	67.1

- Almost 1 in 5 (17.8%) London youth aged 10-19 live in **low income households**. In Southwestern Ontario, 12.9% of youth in this age range live in low income, and 14.1% in Ontario.
- Many teenagers practice **unsafe sex**, resulting in **sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)** and **unplanned pregnancies**. STDs, especially chlamydia, are 29% higher in Middlesex-London than the rest of Ontario. **Teen pregnancies** have increased 16.4% from 1986 to 1993 in Southwestern Ontario.



## What can I do?

Provide the youth of your area with the right tools to become productive members of society. To "protect" youth, they need:

At home,

- no access to cigarettes, alcohol, drugs or weapons.
- high expectations for school performance.
- a parental figure physically present at "key times": before and after school, dinner, and bedtime.
- to feel understood, loved, wanted and paid attention to by their family.

At school,

- to feel their teachers are fair.
- to feel close to people at school.
- to get along with teachers and other students.

On an individual level,

- to have high self-esteem.
- to not work too many hours outside of school.

At the community level, we should provide,

- support for youth and their families.
- spaces and places for youth to go.
- activities that stimulate youth.

## Community Resources

There are many sources for more information about these topics. Contact local organizations, such as the Middlesex-London Health Unit or the Addiction Research Foundation.

### Newsletter information source

Community Health and Well-Being in Southwestern Ontario: A Resource for Planning. Published by the Faculty of Medicine, The University of Western Ontario, and the Middlesex-London Health Unit.

**To order a full copy of the report please contact:**

Population and Community Health Unit, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, H110, Health Sciences Addition, The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario N6A 5C1 (Cost: \$14.95)

Ph: (519) 661-2111 x6212 or x6610

Fax: (519) 661-3797 E-mail: [pchu@med.uwo.ca](mailto:pchu@med.uwo.ca)

Web site: <http://www.med.uwo.ca/pchu/pchu.htm>

Information throughout the newsletter is provided courtesy of Dr. E. Vingilis and Ms. J. Sarkella of the Population & Community Health Unit; Drs. R. Alder and C. de Keresztes, and Mr. B. Lueske of the Middlesex-London Health Unit; Dr. J. Bramwell and Mr. N. Luo of the London Board of Education; and the Ontario Student Drug Use Survey, Addiction Research Foundation.



LONDON COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

### The Community Health Reporter

Published quarterly by the Population & Community Health Unit, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, UWO

Editors: Jennifer Sarkella and Jane Seeley

This newsletter is made possible by a generous donation from The London Community Foundation

Our mission is to increase awareness of health problems and their solutions.