

Stress and alcohol use among West Asian youth

West Asians make up one of the non-European ethnic groups in Canada. Available data from the 2011 National Household Survey indicated that over 500,000 people of Arab and West Asian origin lived in Canada, representing almost two percent of the total population of Canada. The average age of the population of West Asian people is the second youngest in Canada, and a large percent of the population are adolescents. In spite of this, very little is known about the social and health outcomes among West Asian youth living in Canada.

Using data from the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) completed by nearly 30,000 BC youth in Grades 7 through 12, this fact sheet considers the health of West Asian youth (e.g., Afghani, Iranian, Arab, Kazakhstani, etc.). Specifically, we compared the health of Canadian-born West Asian youth to immigrant West Asian youth and considered their experiences with mental despair and binge drinking.



In total, 2% of youth who completed the BC AHS identified as West Asian. Among these youth, 51% were born in Canada and 49% were born outside of Canada.

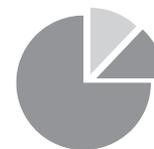
About half (51%) of West Asian males born outside of Canada reported binge drinking in the past month, compared to 42% of their Canadian born counterparts. This was opposite for females, with those born in Canada more likely to report binge drinking during the past month than their foreign-born counterparts (38% vs. 26%).

Students were asked if they had felt so stressed in the past month that they did not feel they could work or function properly. The percentage of students reporting this level of extreme stress was similar between males born in Canada and those born abroad (5%). However, foreign-born females (19%) were more likely to report feeling extremely stressed in the past month than their Canadian born counterparts (17%).

The fact sheet was created by Abdul Hakim AlMakadma and Basel Mhd Safwan Bazerbachi, students at Al Faisal University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, as members of the student group at the McCreary Centre Society, with the support of Dr. Ryan Watson and Dr. Jones Adjei, postdoctoral fellows affiliated with the McCreary Centre Society and the University of British Columbia.

To view provincial, regional and topic specific results and learn more about the BC AHS, visit: www.mcs.bc.ca/ahs.

To learn more about McCreary's student group or if you are a student who might be interested in joining, visit: www.mcs.bc.ca/student_research_group.



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School & Family Connectedness

The BC AHS measure of family connectedness includes youth's perception of their family having fun together, their family paying attention to them, and family understanding them. School connectedness measures how much youth feel a part of their school, feel safe at school, are happy at school, that school staff treated them fairly, and how much school staff cares about them.

When West Asian students reported having high levels of family and school connectedness, they also had reduced odds of binge drinking and reporting feelings of extreme despair.



Community Explanations



A draft of this fact sheet was shared with members of Vancouver's West Asian community. They noted some of the things that can increase stress and influence health among West Asian youth include getting used to a different work environment, different food, and a different school system, where youth are given greater freedoms that can cause confusion and tension with their parents. Other responses to the findings from community stakeholders included:

- Immigrant West Asian youth might be less likely to report despair if their parents encourage keeping their feelings more private than among their Canadian-born West Asian counterparts.
- Different cultural norms in Canada compared to their country of origin might lead some young people to feel more free to try alcohol or other substances; for example, in Saudi Arabia, there is no place to buy alcohol.
- Canada requires immigrants to undergo health exams before they come, and so they tend to be healthier than the general population they came from, or the population they're coming to; this is the "healthy immigrant effect," that has been noted in other studies.
- Unfamiliarity with Canadian schooling systems and the English language might also explain some of the disparities for West Asian immigrant youth.
- Male and female youth in Canada often experience different pressures and expectations to those they may face in their country of origin.



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