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Preliminary Results for Street Racing Among Adults in Ontario: Relations to Alcohol and Cannabis Use

Dear Editor:

Street racing has a long history, dating back to the 1920s shortly after cars became cheap, plentiful and available to the masses. Many movies and songs idolize street racers, e.g., "Rebel Without a Cause" and "The Fast and the Furious". There have been several recent instances where street racers or innocent bystanders have been fatally injured. Street racing is now a problem in countries worldwide, with deaths and injuries reported in many.^{1,2} However, little is known about the factors associated with this behaviour. We examined street racing and its links to various alcohol and cannabis measures among adults in Ontario.

We employed data from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Monitor (CM), a general population telephone survey conducted in Ontario (January 2009 to December 2010). The survey consists of a representative sample of adults (aged 18 and older) who were asked if they had driven a car, truck or SUV in a street race in the previous 12 months (N=4,273).³ Demographic and substance use measures were also collected in the survey.

Results from preliminary analyses (see Table 1) revealed that the prevalence of self-reported street racing within the previous year was 1.0%, and was significantly related to sex, age, alcohol problems (8+ on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, AUDIT), heavy drinking (monthly drinking of 5+ drinks on one occasion), cannabis use and drinking driving. Street racing was most commonly reported by males between the ages of 18 and 34 (4.5%, 95% CI 2.5-7.9), drinking drivers (5.5%), respondents with an alcohol problem (3.0%), respondents who used cannabis in the previous 12 months (3.0%), and heavy drinkers (1.9%). It was found that, compared to non-racers, those who engaged in street racing were five times as likely to have alcohol problems, seven times as likely to drink and drive and four times as likely to use cannabis.

This study suggests that heavy drinking, alcohol problems, cannabis use and drinking driving are associated with street racing among adults. These characteristics are similar to those found for aggressive driving, road rage and other types of dangerous driving.⁴⁻⁶ The results given here are preliminary as they are not based on a large sample of street racers but rather a large sample of the population. Further studies are needed to extend and amplify these results, however in the meantime it appears that street racing is associated with both alcohol and other drug use in high-risk drivers.

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Table 1. Street Racing by Sample Characteristics: CM January 2009 to December 2010

	Sample N	Street Racer		
		n	%	95% CI
Total	4273	32	1.0	0.7-1.5
Sex***				
Males	1916	25	1.7	1.1-2.7
Females	2357	7	0.3	0.1-0.7
Age (years)***				
18-34	616	15	2.4	1.3-4.2
35-54	1741	10	0.6	0.3-1.3
55+	1832	7	0.5	0.2-1.2
AUDIT 8+***				
No	3681	17	0.6	0.3-1.0
Yes	520	12	3.0	1.6-5.7
Five plus drinking monthly – last 12 months*				
No	3529	21	0.8	0.5-1.3
Yes	725	10	1.9	0.9-3.9
Weekly alcohol volume consumed (drinks) mean (sd)				
Non-street racer			3.63 (6.97)	3.39-3.87
Street racer			5.45 (6.29)	3.06-7.85
Drinking driving – last 12 months***				
No	3989	22	0.7	0.4-1.2
Yes	249	10	5.5	2.7-10.9
Cannabis use – last 12 months***				
No	3784	19	0.7	0.4-1.2
Yes	453	13	3.0	1.6-5.3

Notes: N is the number of unweighted cases and % is the percentage of subgroups of each variable based on weighted data. All analyses are sample design adjusted. 95% CI=95% confidence interval. Comparisons of street racers and non-street racers on each variable were performed using STATA. Chi-square and t-test significance: *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001.

CM = Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Monitor.