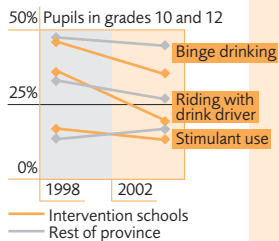


A further step forward in the development of **harm reduction education** has been taken in Nova Scotia in Canada, where the approach has been extended beyond alcohol and tobacco to illegal drugs. Two of the province's seven school districts agreed to participate in **the study**.¹ Each nominated two secondary schools to cooperate with project staff to devise interventions appropriate for their pupils. Steering committees of stakeholders (including pupils) implemented a diversity of activities such as media campaigns, parent information sessions, teaching videos, first aid education, recreation and leisure opportunities, rapport-building between adults and teenagers, and fundraising for worthy causes. However, only the two schools with older pupils were prepared to focus on harm reduction objectives. There was general agreement that this was appropriate and feasible for pupils aged 15–18 but not for pupils under 14.

Surveys of substance use and related harm were undertaken before the initiatives started and again four years later after study field work had ended. Results were compared with identical surveys conducted in all the province's schools. Among older pupils in grades 10 and 12 (average ages 12.5 and 13.5 years), on all but one measure (smoking prevalence), both substance use and substance-related harm had fallen more in the two intervention schools than in the remaining schools in the province. The differences were statistically significant for LSD and stimulant use and for riding with a drink-driver, and nearly so for binge drinking, driving after using cannabis, and causing damage under the influence of drugs **▶ chart** for examples.



With just two relevant schools, non-random allocation, and diverse interventions, we cannot be sure that the outcomes were caused by the harm reduction activities. Arguing that they were is the fact that similar changes were less noticeable in the younger pupils not exposed to these activities, and that in relation to drinking or smoking, other larger and better controlled studies have recorded similarly promising outcomes.

LINKS Nuggets 10.11 4.14 2.13
Nuggette 14.2

¹ Poulin C. *et al.* "Should harm minimization as an approach to adolescent substance use be embraced by junior and senior high schools? Empirical evidence from an integrated school- and community-based demonstration intervention addressing drug use among adolescents." *International Journal of Drug Policy*: 2005, 16(6), p. 403–414 **DS**