

Lifetime Doctor-Diagnosed Mental Health Conditions and Current Substance Use among Gay and Bisexual Men Living in Vancouver, Canada

What is the prevalence of mental health disorders among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM) in Metro Vancouver, Canada?

What is the importance of this study?

- Marginalization on the basis of sexual orientation increases the risk for problematic substance use and poor mental health.
- There is a link between an individual's mental health and substance use.
- Mental health conditions and substance use have important implications for clinical and public health practice.

FACT BOX

Studies have found that gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men have higher rates of mental health conditions and substance use, compared with heterosexual men.

How was this study conducted?

- Participants were asked whether or not they had ever been told by a doctor they have any of the following mental health conditions: depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and alcohol use disorder or any other substance use disorders.
- If the answer was yes, participants were subsequently asked if they were currently receiving treatment for any mental health conditions. They were asked about their current use of a range of substances.

What are the key study findings?

- A total of 17.4% of GBM reported a lifetime doctor-diagnosed alcohol or substance use disorder, and 35.2% reported any other lifetime doctor-diagnosed mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety, etc.
- Over half of GBM reported having been diagnosed with a mental health disorder within their lifetimes. Of those, 10.5% reported three or more different mental health disorders. Half reported currently receiving treatment for a mental health disorder.
- Factors associated with increased odds of reporting a lifetime doctor-diagnosed *substance use disorder* were being HIV-positive, using crystal methamphetamine within the past six months and using heroin in the past six months. Students and those with higher incomes were less likely to report a *substance use disorder*.
- Increased odds of reporting a lifetime doctor-diagnosed *other mental health disorder* were associated with increased anxiety symptoms. Latino GBM, GBM who were not citizens or permanent residents, and GBM who lived outside of the Vancouver downtown area were *less likely* to report *other mental health disorders*.



- GBM who were open about being gay were *more likely* to report having any other mental health conditions, possibly because they may be targets for harassment and discrimination.

What do these findings mean?

- Substance use and mental health conditions were highly prevalent amongst GBM.
- According to the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey, a third of Canadians have reported a mental health or substance use disorder; more than half of the GBM in our sample reported any lifetime doctor-diagnosed mental health disorder.
- Health promotion and interventions should address issues of substance use, mental health and sexuality among GBM. Future research can help direct these efforts by examining possible factors contributing to mental health, such as discrimination and stigma.

What is the BC-CfE Momentum Health Study?

Evidence from British Columbia and elsewhere has demonstrated the expansion of access to antiretroviral HIV treatment (ART) can result in population-level reductions in HIV incidence. This is the concept behind the made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention[®] strategy, or TasP[®], which aims to expand early HIV testing and treatment to improve patients' health and curb the spread of HIV. Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM) represent the most affected HIV risk group, both in BC and Canada. The BC-CfE Momentum Health Study is designed to measure changes in HIV risk behaviour, attitudes toward TasP[®] and the proportion of HIV-positive GBM with unsuppressed viral load over time in the Vancouver region. The study uses respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to obtain a more representative sample reflecting the diversity of the GBM population in Vancouver.

Full paper available online:

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