

A Latent Class Analysis of Substance Use and Culture among Gay, Bisexual and other Men who have Sex with Men

How do patterns of substance use represent the social, economic and identity-related experiences of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men in Metro Vancouver, Canada?

What is the importance of this study?

- Gay identity and community connectedness have been associated with elevated drug use among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM).
- Reasons for use include helping gbMSM cope with minority stress and marginalization, as well as to facilitate social bonding.

FACT BOX

A recent study has shown that party-and-play (PnP) drug users have higher levels of resilience, lower levels of perceived stigma and greater connectedness to other gay and bisexual men.

How was this study conducted?

- Participants were asked about their use of various substances over the past six months including: alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, erectile dysfunction drugs, poppers, crack, cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, speed, GHB, benzodiazepine, mushrooms and ecstasy.
- Responses were analyzed in relation to social, economic, and identity-related factors. These include psycho-social factors, community connectedness and sexual behaviour.

What are the key study findings?

- The most commonly reported substances were alcohol (85.9%), tobacco (43.8%), marijuana (61.1%) and poppers (37.6%).
- About a quarter of respondents reported using cocaine (25.8%), ecstasy (25.2%), erectile dysfunction drugs (24.2%), crystal methamphetamine (19.9%) and GHB (19.0%).
- Six different “classes” of drug-use were identified: limited drug use (36.7%), conventional drug use (i.e. tobacco, alcohol, marijuana; 25.9%), sex drug use (11.4%), club drug use (9.5%), street drug use (12.1%) and assorted drug use (4.5%).
- Respondents who were found to be in the “sex drug use” class were more likely to have higher sensation seeking and escape motivation, to self-report as HIV-positive and to make more than \$30,000.
- Respondents who were found to be in the “club drug use” class were more likely to be younger, had higher sensation seeking and more likely to have visited gay bars and clubs in the past six months.



- Respondents who were found to be in the “assorted drug use” class were more likely to be younger, receive income from drug sales and to attend group sex events in the past six months. These respondents were less likely to be in stable housing situations.

What do these findings mean?

- Patterns of substance use relate to key risk factors for HIV by highlighting the social, economic and identity-related factors that underlie patterns of substance use among gbMSM.
- There is a need for substance use policies, prevention efforts, and treatment programs that consider the diversity of gay and bisexual men’s experiences. Public health programs should also aim to reduce social disparities between mainstream and marginalized groups of gbMSM.

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 (gbMSM) 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 gbMSM 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 gbMSM population in Vancouver.

Citation: Kiffer G. Card, Heather L. Armstrong, Allison Carter, Zishan Cui, Lu Wang, Julia Zhu, Nathan J. Lachowsky, David M. Moore, Robert S. Hogg & Eric A. Roth (2018): A latent class analysis of substance use and culture among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, DOI: 10.1080/13691058.2018.1439186

Full study available online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29589798>



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