

Smoking rates significantly higher among homosexual men, women

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Men and women who are gay or lesbian are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to smoke, according to findings from a review study carried out by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The findings, published in the August issue of the journal, [Tobacco Control](#), show that as many as 37 percent of homosexual women and 33 percent of homosexual men smoke. That compares to national smoking rates of 18 percent for women and 24 percent for men in the 2006 National Health Interview Survey.

The authors reviewed findings from 42 studies of the prevalence of [tobacco](#) use among sexual minorities in the U.S. published between 1987 and May 2007. The findings suggest smoking is a significant health inequality for sexual minorities.

Recognizing and understanding the increased risk in a particular population can help policymakers, health-care officials and others provide support for people more likely to start smoking or who may want to stop [smoking](#), said Joseph Lee, lead author of the review and a social research specialist with the Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program in the UNC School of Medicine.

A number of small or geographically limited studies have suggested that sexual minorities have higher rates of tobacco use than the general population, said Lee, who conducted the review as a master's student in

collaboration with Cathy Melvin, Ph.D., at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and UNC's Sheps Center for Health Services Research, and Gabriel Griffin, a medical student at the Duke University School of Medicine.

“The underlying causes of these disparities are not fully explained by this review,” Lee said. “Likely explanations include the success of tobacco industry’s targeted marketing to gays and lesbians, as well as time spent in smoky social venues and stress from discrimination.”

“Tobacco is likely the number one cause of death among gays and lesbians,” Lee said, “but there is hope. Many gay and lesbian organizations are starting to reject addictive funding from the tobacco industry, and the community is organizing itself to address this health inequality through the National LGBT Tobacco Control Network.”

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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