

Most men in long-term study of HIV report low use of illicit drugs

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Most older gay and bisexual men enrolled in a long-term study of HIV used recreational drugs infrequently over a 10-year period, report University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health researchers at the XVIII International AIDS Conference.

The study explored the drug use habits of 1,378 HIV-positive and negative gay and bisexual men, ages 44 to 63, enrolled in the Pitt Men's Study, part of the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS), which began in 1983 and is the longest-running National Institutes of Health-funded investigation of HIV/AIDS.

Study researchers surveyed participants about their use of [recreational drugs](#) (poppers, crack, cocaine, methamphetamine and ecstasy) between 1998 and 2008. They found that 79 percent of participants reported infrequent drug use, and three subgroups emerged: nearly 6 percent who reported consistently high drug use; more than 7 percent who increased their drug use; and 7 percent who decreased their use of drugs.

"We know that drug use among men who have sex with men contributes to a host of health problems, including [HIV](#) infection, but we know very little about how drug use changes as these men age," said Jessica G. Burke, Ph.D., study author and assistant professor, Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, Pitt's Graduate School of Public Health. "Previous studies have linked drug use in gay men to risky sexual behaviors and to higher rates of [HIV infection](#), but most of these studies have focused primarily on specific time-points and on

younger men."

According to Dr. Burke, the data will provide needed insights to develop interventions for preventing and treating drug use among gay and [bisexual men](#) as they age. Moving forward, she will be combining these results with qualitative data collected through interviews with participants about their experiences with drugs.

"Although a majority of participants reported infrequent drug use, three subgroups of [men](#) displayed distinct patterns of use over 10 years of midlife. Understanding more about these subgroups and the factors that lead to drug use will give us a better understanding of how we can address this behavior among similar individuals."

Provided by University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences

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