

Bisexuals use cannabis more frequently for coping, enhancement

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Young people classified as bisexual not only use cannabis more frequently but also are more likely to use it to cope with mental health issues and for what researchers call experiential "enhancement."

A recent study, titled "The Pot at the End of the Rainbow," is one of the first to examine motives for [cannabis use](#) among [sexual minorities](#) quantitatively. Led by Washington State University psychologists, researchers analyzed [survey data](#) from nearly 4,700 university students from across the country. Of the participants, 23% were classified as bisexual after indicating that they were not exclusively attracted to one gender.

"The group classified as bisexual was more likely to report using cannabis to cope as well as for enhancement, which is a bit surprising," said Kyle Schofield, a WSU Ph.D. candidate in psychology and first author on the study published in the journal *Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research*. "The coping motive was less surprising because we also saw that the group classified as bisexual reported higher levels of all the [mental health problems](#) that we looked at in the study."

The bisexual group reported higher levels of cannabis use disorder, [social anxiety](#), generalized anxiety, depression and suicidality than either the groups classified as exclusively "straight" or "gay"—findings that are in line with previous research.

"People who are in sexual minority groups not only face normal life stress but also an additional column of stress that's related to being a sexual minority," said Schofield. "For [bisexual people](#), there may be even more different types of stress since they can face discrimination from gay as well as straight communities, and additional stress can lead to negative mental health outcomes."

The authors said the study results could help improve mental health target interventions for bisexual individuals.

For this study, Schofield worked with his advising professor Carrie Cuttler to analyze archival data from an Addictions Research Team

survey, which combines participant pools from 10 universities across the U.S.

The researchers focused on survey respondents who were ages 18 to 30. They relied on a question that asked participants to rank their attraction to genders on a scale, grouping those who reported being "mostly heterosexual" and "mostly homosexual" as bisexual along with those who claimed both types of attraction. This yielded 3,483 who were in the "straight" group, another 1,081 in the "bisexual" group, and a small group of 105 individuals who were classified as "gay."

The researchers used the "Marijuana Motives Measure," which is based off one developed for alcohol, to assess five potential reasons for use: enhancement, conformity, expansion, coping and social. While some of the motives, like coping, have negative issues associated with them, enhancement does not, as of yet.

While the study could not give a reason this motive was so strong with the bisexual group, Cuttler speculated that it might have to do with being open to new experiences.

"Enhancement is about expanding one's own awareness, being more open to experience and more creative, so perhaps it all this comes back to openness," said Cuttler, an assistant professor of psychology and senior author on the study.

From this sample, the researchers also found that people in the bisexual group were not only more likely to report using cannabis and using it more frequently but also were more likely to use all three types of cannabis listed in the survey: flower, edibles and concentrates.

Cuttler said this was concerning because concentrates typically contain a higher level of THC or tetrahydrocannabinol, the psychoactive

component of cannabis.

The authors acknowledged that the study was limited by the use of sexual attraction data rather than sexual identity but hoped the results would spur further investigations. The authors also noted that they had limited power to detect differences in the group classified as gay given the relatively small size of that group.

"I hope that this research helps instigate future, large-scale studies where people are able to self-identify themselves as gay, bisexual or straight as well as those with large samples of other groups that are less studied, such as transgender and nonbinary individuals," said Cuttler.

More information: Kyle Schofield et al, Pot at the End of the Rainbow: Cannabis Use Among Sexual Minorities, *Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1089/can.2022.0240](https://doi.org/10.1089/can.2022.0240)

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