

Lesbians, gays suffer more mental health issues, drug use problems: Survey

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Lesbians, gays and bisexuals are experiencing more mental health and

substance use issues than their heterosexual peers, researchers say.

According to a new [government report](#) released Tuesday, this includes major depressive episodes, serious thoughts of suicide, and more misuse of alcohol and drugs.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health includes a question about [sexual orientation](#) and has since 2015. Although that question on this 2021-2022 report from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) focused solely on people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual, the survey will include transgender and nonbinary people in 2023, CNN reported.

"It is really important data, especially coming from an organization like SAMHSA that has such an influence over both national policy as well as [resource allocation](#) in terms of what kinds of prevention, treatment and recovery services get supported at the federal level," Dr. Jeremy Kidd, a psychiatrist who has worked on studies to improve [health outcomes](#) for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer populations, told CNN.

The report notes that "[sexual minorities](#) experience unique stressors that can contribute to adverse substance use and [mental health](#) outcomes."

Among the findings are that bisexual females were six times more likely to have attempted suicide in the previous year than their straight peers. Bisexual women were also three times more likely to have an opioid use disorder.

Meanwhile, bisexual males also reported being three times more likely to have had problems with serious mental illness in the previous year.

Issues experienced by [bisexual individuals](#) may include not only the discrimination that others who are LGBTQ face but also "invisibility and

erasure," according to the report.

"For instance, you can imagine being in environments that might be validating of people who have gay and lesbian identities but might either not recognize bisexual identity—so they are sort of invisible in that space—or might be really invalidating of individuals with bisexual identity, even while the environment is affirming or at least a little more neutral to folks who are gay or lesbian," Kidd explained.

The report also found that about one-third of all bisexual people and gay males reported a problem with substance use disorder in the previous year.

Women and people of color in the LGBTQ community may have even more challenges, according to the report.

The report found that more than 1 in 4 bisexual females and more than 1 in 7 lesbian females had experienced a major depressive episode in the year of the survey. They were also about twice as likely to have smoked tobacco that month as straight women, as well as more likely to say they had been binge drinking and to be heavy drinkers.

For men, answers were similar for those who were gay, bisexual and straight in terms of smoking, binge drinking and heavy drinking.

People of all sexual identities identified marijuana as the most commonly used illicit drug.

Kidd noted that affirming programming and treatment needs to intentionally support all the segments of the community.

"LGBT individuals experience additional stress as a result of discrimination and stigma, stigma both at the societal level but also the

way that living in a society that privileges heterosexuality that has homophobic laws and policies comes to sort of teach LGB people even to view themselves as inferior," Kidd said.

Having at least one supportive adult in the life of someone who is LGBTQ can make a difference.

"Having that person in that young person's life that says 'I see you, and I affirm you' can be hugely protective against substance use problems later down the line, because it sort of challenges that narrative that we're talking about when people experience stigma and discrimination that teaches people that they're less than," Kidd said.

More information: The Trevor Project offers [support](#) for people who are LGBTQ.

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