Medical Xpress

Mixed news on drug abuse among lesbian, gay Americans

October 13 2016

(HealthDay)—Lesbian, gay and bisexual adults have higher rates of substance use and mental illness than their straight counterparts, a U.S. government report shows.

On the plus side, this group is much more likely than heterosexuals to receive needed treatment for those disorders should they arise, the same report finds.

"This report offers unprecedented insight into the behavioral health needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Americans—people critical to our community whose health concerns have often been overlooked," said Kana Enomoto, deputy principal administrator at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

She spoke in a news release from the agency, which issued the new findings Oct. 13.

The new data comes from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, focusing on a wide range of U.S. adults.

The study found that about 39 percent of lesbian, gay or bisexual adults said they had used some type of illicit drug over the past year, compared to about 17 percent of straight respondents.

In terms of people battling an actual substance use disorder (for example, alcoholism or illicit drug abuse), about 15 percent of lesbian,

gay or bisexual adults said they had done so in the past year, compared to just under 8 percent of heterosexuals.

Rates of cigarette smoking and drinking were also higher among lesbian, gay and bisexual adults, the SAMHSA report found. For example, smoking rates were about 32 percent among this group, compared to just under 21 percent for straight adults.

Rates of past-month drinking were nearly 64 percent and about 56 percent for these two groups, respectively, the report found.

However, lesbian, gay and bisexual adults seemed to be more amenable to seeking out treatment for a substance-abuse disorder if one developed. The report found that among adults who required substance use treatment, 15.3 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual adults received it at a specialty facility over the past year, compared with 10.6 percent of heterosexual adults.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual adults were more than twice as likely as heterosexual adults to have had any kind of mental illness in the past year (37.4 percent versus 17 percent), and also had a higher rate of past year serious mental illness (13 versus 3.6 percent).

However, treatment rates were higher for lesbian, gay and bisexual adults with a mental illness, the researchers said. For adults with any kind of mental illness in the past year, lesbian, gay and bisexual adults were more likely to receive mental health treatment than heterosexual adults (48.5 percent versus 42.6 percent).

About 4.3 percent of American adults are either lesbian, gay or bisexual, according to the report.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention has more on LGBTQ health.

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Citation: Mixed news on drug abuse among lesbian, gay Americans (2016, October 13) retrieved 18 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-10-news-drug-abuse-lesbian-gay.html

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