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Marijuana Use Prevention

High Risk Populations: LGBTQ Students

What does the population look like?

- The College Student Health Survey (CSHS) Report, published by the University of Minnesota Boynton Health Service, found that, for the years 2007-2011, 1.9% of adult students identified as gay or lesbian, 3.0% identified as bisexual, and 1.8% were unsure of their sexual orientation. Of those gay and lesbian students, 2.6% identified as transgender, as did 1.7% of all bisexual students.¹

What is the prevalence of marijuana use among LGBTQ students?

- CSHS data show a significantly higher rate of current (past 30-day) marijuana use for gay and lesbian students than for heterosexual students in Minnesota (16.8% vs. 10.3%). Bisexual students reported the highest rate—more than twice the rate of heterosexual students—at 23.6%.¹
- Other studies found that although college-aged lesbians are often less likely than their heterosexual peers to smoke marijuana, bisexual women are about twice as likely.^{2,3,4} Similarly, gay men are less likely than heterosexuals to use marijuana, but bisexual men are slightly more likely.⁵
- One small study found that lesbian and bisexual college women were 4.9 times more likely than heterosexual women to report smoking marijuana; again, gay and bisexual men didn't significantly differ from their heterosexual peers.⁶

What helps explain the relationship between LGBTQ students and marijuana?

- **Higher rates of depression.** Gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students in Minnesota are more likely to report a diagnosis of depression in the past 12 months, with 18% and 17% of bisexual men and women, and 48% and 68% of gays and lesbians reporting a diagnosis, compared to 27% and 39% of heterosexual men and women.¹
- **Challenges for bisexual students.** Bisexual women are more likely than their heterosexual peers to report pro-drug beliefs; lower resistance and self-efficacy; more exposure to substance-using peers; and poorer mental health. They are more likely to report greater, more frequent, and more problematic drug and alcohol use.⁴

This document is part of a series designed to support Minnesota's Partnership For Success grantees working on marijuana use prevention on college campuses. More resources from this series can be found in the Toolbox at SUMN.org

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LGBTQ Students and Marijuana Use, *continued*

The LGBTQ community has historically socialized in gay bars; alternative meeting places can provide community support and socialization without reliance on substance use

- **Coping with stress and feeling unsafe.** LGBT students are more likely than heterosexual students to feel unsafe on campus, to experience or feel threatened by physical or sexual violence, and to perceive greater stress.⁷
- **Marginalization.** Social and political marginalization may lead to increased substance abuse.⁵
- **A history of communal substance use.** Historically, gay bars served as safe meeting places for openly LGBTQ people. Although there are many social alternatives now, gay bars are still important in LGBTQ culture. Accordingly, alcohol and drug use are associated with the coming-out process, which often occurs during the college years, and lessens afterwards.⁸

What are the potential prevention strategies?

- **Support for LGBTQ students on campus.** Inclusive campus policies, LGBTQ-oriented campus groups, and welcoming mental health services can alleviate feelings of alienation and can provide support for LGBTQ students.
- **Sober activities.** Alternative activities hosted by LGBTQ groups on campus can provide substance-free socializing for students who may otherwise find community support at gay bars or in social groups designed for older LGBTQ people who are outside the campus community.⁸
- **Mental health and substance use screening and preventative care.** Safe health care services are especially important for LGBTQ students⁶ and can provide screening and/or referrals for substance abuse or mental health issues.
- **Community norms education.** Such education may be helpful, particularly for bisexual women who report higher peer substance use.⁹
- **Community support.** More research is needed to develop specific strategies for college-aged LGBTQ people, but LGBTQ community groups that are not centered on campus may also be effective at reaching out to students. Collaborations with community groups could be effective.

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LGBTQ Students and Marijuana Use, *continued*

Bisexual students often report rates of marijuana use that are 2 to 5 times higher than those of their heterosexual counterparts

Resources

Kognito

Developed in partnership with the Trevor Project and Campus Pride to promote campus inclusivity and to provide screening, intervention, and referrals to campus resources.

<https://www.kognito.com/products/lgbtq/about/>

The American College Health Association (ACHA)

10 Ways to Make your Health Center More Welcoming for Diverse Students

http://www.acha.org/topics/docs/10Ways_WelcomeDiversity.pdf

Coalition of Allies for LGBT Health

http://www.acha.org/Committees_Coalitions_Task_Forces/allies_for_lgbt.cfm

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Top Health Issues for LGBT Populations Information & Resource Kit.

<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA12-4684/SMA12-4684.pdf>

SAMHSA/CSAT: A Provider's Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Individuals Training Curriculum, First Edition

<http://www.attcnetwork.org/regcenters/generalContent.asp?rcid=12&content=STCUSTOM3>

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LGBTQ Students and Marijuana Use, *continued*

Citations

1. Boynton Health Service. (2013). University of Minnesota. Health and Health Related Behaviors: Minnesota Postsecondary Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students. *College Student Health Survey Report*. http://www.bhs.umn.edu/surveys/survey-results/2007-2011_LGB_CSHSReport.pdf. Accessed July 2014.
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4. Tucker, J. S., Ellickson, P. L., & Klein, D. J. (2008). Understanding differences in substance use among bisexual and heterosexual young women. *Women's Health Issues*, 18(5), 387-398.
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6. Ridner, S. L., Frost, K., & Lajoie, A. S. (2006). Health information and risk behaviors among lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 18(8), 374-378.
7. Reed, E., Prado, G., Matsumoto, A., & Amaro, H. (2010). Alcohol and drug use and related consequences among gay, lesbian and bisexual college students: Role of experiencing violence, feeling safe on campus, and perceived stress. *Addictive Behaviors*, 35(2), 168-171.
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