

Review of study: Cochran, B. N & Cauce, A. M (March, 2006).
Characteristics of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals entering substance abuse treatment. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 30, 135-146.

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March 27, 2006 - Previous studies looking at correlations between sexual orientation and substance abuse had been criticized largely because of sampling issues. The samples in earlier studies were mainly drawn in places where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals congregated socially (namely, gay bars).

The criticisms, therefore, were that these samples overestimated the prevalence of substance abuse problems and pathology within the LGBT community. However, the present study, supported in part by a grant from the National Institute of Drug Abuse, gathered its sample outside of social arenas. The researchers compared substance abuse problems, psychopathology, and medical service utilization of both heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals in a sample size of over 17,000. Both groups were studied on matched criteria, that being that they had to be over 18 year of age and entered into a state-approved chemical treatment program. Therefore, the researchers claim that their study provides a more representative sample of both groups when investigating their substance abuse characteristics.

The findings of the study showed that openly LGBT individuals enter treatment with more severe substance abuse problems, greater psychopathology, and greater medical service utilization when compared to heterosexual clients.

As it related to substance abuse issues, the findings showed that while heterosexuals are more likely to endorse alcohol as a primary drug of abuse, LGBT steered toward harder substances such as methamphetamines and crack. LGBT clients used drugs of abuse more frequently than their heterosexual counterparts.

In terms of psychopathology, LGBT clients took psychotropic medications in twice the proportion of heterosexual clients. As far as domestic violence, openly LGBT were significantly more likely to be victims of domestic violence than the heterosexual population. In terms of overall health care utilization, LGBT individuals more frequently sought services than heterosexual individuals. When it came to interfacing with the legal system, however, heterosexuals were more likely to have legal involvements than LGBT clients.

In conclusion, the researchers state "Although these findings cannot resolve the question of why LGBT individuals might abuse substances, the results point to a pattern of more severe problems among openly LGBT clients than among heterosexual clients." (p. 144).

This study adds weight to the many other discussions citing greater pathologies within the LGBT population. The authors, however, want to use the findings to justify more "LGBT-specific substance abuse treatment programs." In spite of this, the *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* should be congratulated for publishing the findings.