

SEXUAL ORIENTATION DIFFERENCES IN ALCOHOL USE DISORDER ACROSS THE ADULT LIFE COURSE

Jessica N. Fish, Ph.D. & Cara Exten, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people are more likely than heterosexual people to meet the criteria for alcohol use disorder (AUD). Sexual orientation differences in AUD are partly explained by the minority stress model, where LGB stigma and discrimination negatively affect mental health and general wellbeing. These experiences of stress, coupled with limited resources (e.g., financial security, social support), work together to influence poor health and maladaptive coping strategies, including alcohol use and abuse.

The life-course perspective emphasizes how early (or earlier) social experiences shape health across the lifespan. Importantly, these factors can be influenced by policy and public health initiative to mitigate risk and promote health across the life course. Unfortunately, there is limited understanding about how risk for AUD changes across the life course for LGB populations. Yet, this information is critical to informing strategies that address risk for AUD among LGB populations.

To address this gap in understanding, the authors used data from the National Epidemiologic Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions III (NESARC-III; $n = 28,090$), a nationally-representative survey of U.S. adults aged 18 and over. In particular, the authors assessed (1) heterosexual and LGB differences in AUD across the lifespan; (2) whether these differences varied for men and women; and (3) how LGB-related discrimination was associated with rates of AUD across the life course.

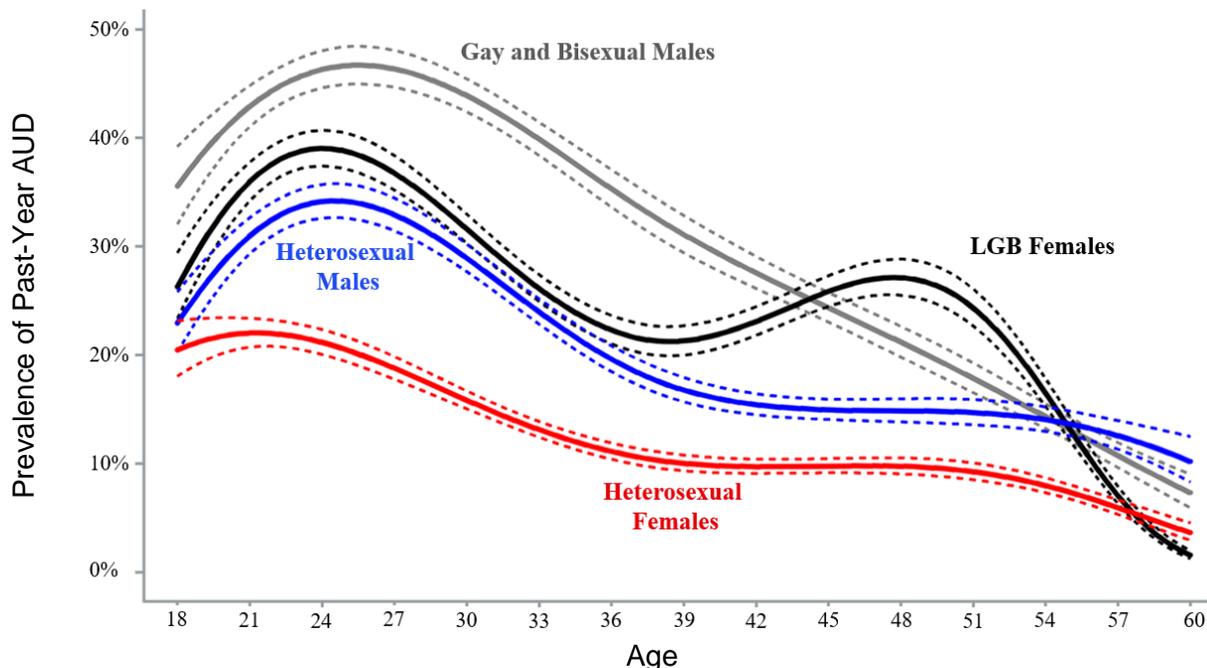
KEY FINDINGS

- LGB men and women had a significantly greater prevalence of AUD than heterosexual participants across most age years, with the highest gap among those in their late 20s and early 30s.
- Gay and bisexual men aged 18-45 had the highest prevalence of AUD overall.
- LGB women aged 45-55 were significantly more likely to meet the criteria for AUD.
- LGB adults who experienced discrimination in the past year were more likely to meet the criteria for AUD between the ages of 23-34 and again from 42-53.
- The association between past-year discrimination and AUD was strongest for gay and bisexual men.

POLICY & PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Practitioners need to consider the importance of screening for excessive alcohol use and AUD, particularly when working with young adults in this population.
- Prevention and intervention programs need to address LGB-specific concerns in their programs and practices to help mitigate risk and improve treatment outcomes.
- Policies that address and prevent sexual orientation-based discrimination may help decrease the risk for AUD among LGB people.
- Policies, programs, and interventions should be aware of developmental and cohort differences in the experience of discrimination and its association with AUD.

Prevalence of AUD by Sex and Sexual Orientation



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jessica N. Fish (jnfish@umd.edu) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Science at University of Maryland, College Park and Deputy Director for Research and Evaluation in the UMD-PRC.

Cara Exten is an Assistant Professor in the College of Nursing at Pennsylvania State University.

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REFERENCE

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