Sexual Orientation and Alcohol Use Disorders

NIAAA Social Work Education

Module 10G

(revised 03/04)
Outline

- Definitions
- Research Limitations
- Prevalence of Gay & Lesbian Alcohol Use
- Risk and Protective Factors
“As an oppressed and often invisible population, we don't even know how many of us there really are, much less what percentage of us fall into any category.”
Sexual orientation and gender identity are complicated constructs.
Individuals may not agree with labels.
Tremendous variability and diversity exist.
λ Gay or lesbian
   - Primary sexual and emotional attachments to persons of the same gender
λ Bisexual
   - Individuals who have sexual and/or emotional attachments to both men and women
λ Transgender
   - Individuals who experience lack of fit between societal expectations for sex (male/female) or gender (masculine/feminine)
Research Limitations

Researchers and funding agencies hesitant

Bias in participant samples:

- Definitional confusion
- Convenience sample bias to bar/club-goers
- Convenience bias toward “out” individuals
- Sampling bias toward white, well-educated lesbians and gay men

- Little known about other:
  - ethnicities
  - socio-economic backgrounds
  - educational backgrounds
  - bisexuals or transgendered persons
  - “closeted” persons
## Prevalence of Gay/Lesbian Alcohol Use: Early Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Lesbian &amp; Gay Respondents</th>
<th>Heterosexual Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LESBIANS</td>
<td>FEMALES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GAY MEN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saghiri &amp; Robins, 1973</td>
<td>(N = 57) 35% excessive or</td>
<td>(N = 43) 5% excessive or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dependent</td>
<td>or dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifield, et al., 1977</td>
<td>N = 200 bar users, 98</td>
<td>no comparison group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bartenders, 53 recovering</td>
<td>provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>alcoholics, 132 users of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G/L service center.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lifetime prevalence rate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of 31.4% problem drinkers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and alcoholics among both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lesbians and gay men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lohrenz et al., 1978</td>
<td>(N = 29) not analyzed</td>
<td>(N=145) 29% alcoholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(MAST)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prevalence of Gay/Lesbian Alcohol Use: Recent Research

Bradford & Ryan (1988)
- Lesbian respondents only (no comparisons)
- N=1,852
- 83% drink occasionally
- 25% drink more than once per week
- 6% drink daily
- 14% worried about drinking
Recent Research (continued)

Stall & Wiley (1988)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=748 gay men</th>
<th>N=286 heterosexual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>λ 19% frequent heavy drinking in past 12 months</td>
<td>λ 11% frequent heavy drinking in past 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>λ 6% abstained in past 12 months</td>
<td>λ 3% abstained in past 12 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Recent Research (continued)**

McKirman & Peterson (1989) {Chicago}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N=748 lesbians</th>
<th>N=2,652 gay men</th>
<th>Nat’l averages comparison for general pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15% abstainers</td>
<td>13% abstainers</td>
<td>34% females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78% moderate users</td>
<td>70% moderate users</td>
<td>23% males abstainers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>59% Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54% male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate users</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recent Research (continued)

McKirman & Peterson 1989 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=748 lesbians</th>
<th>N=2,652 gay men</th>
<th>Nat’l averages comparison for general pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9% heavy users</td>
<td>17% heavy users</td>
<td>7% females 21% males heavy users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23% report problems</td>
<td>23% report problems</td>
<td>8% Female 16% male report problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Skinner (1994) *{Trilogy Project, KY}*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N=500 lesbians</th>
<th>N=567 gay men</th>
<th>NHSDA survey comparison groups of women/men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstained in past month</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>58% women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40% men abstained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent, heavy drinking</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>2.5% women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.5% men heavy drinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bloomfield (1993) {San Francisco}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N = 58 lesbians</th>
<th>N = 397 heterosexual women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13% recovering</td>
<td>3% recovering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 58 lesbians</td>
<td>N = 397 heterosexual women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24% abstaining past 12 months</td>
<td>17% abstaining past 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73% light drinkers</td>
<td>82% light drinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% heavy drinkers</td>
<td>1% heavy drinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% problem past yr</td>
<td>15% problem past yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14% AOD help past yr</td>
<td>6% AOD help past yr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Conclusions: Lesbians

- Fewer lesbians than heterosexual women abstain from alcohol.
- Lesbians report more alcohol-related problems than heterosexual women at comparable levels of drinking.
- Lesbian drinking does not decline with age as it does among heterosexuals.
- Use among lesbians appears to be declining with changes in drinking norms in some communities.
Research Conclusions: Gay Men

λ Gay men are less likely to abstain or to drink heavily than heterosexual men
λ Gay men report more alcohol-related problems than heterosexual men at lower levels of use
λ Alcohol use norms among gay men appear to be declining, similar to the pattern with lesbians
Risk/Protective Factors: Dominant Hypotheses

- Centrality of gay bar/club for socialization and support
- Conflicts related to gay/lesbian identity
- Internalized homophobia
- Heterosexism
- Stressors inherent to gay/lesbian lifestyles
- Incongruities in gender roles and expectancies
Risk/Protective Factors (continued)

**Risk factors/variables**
- λ positively associated with alcohol or substance problems
- λ having etiological significance in development of alcohol/substance problems

**Protective factors/variables**
- λ negatively associated with alcohol or substance use problems
- λ having preventive significance
Risk/Protective Factors (continued)

- **Lifestyle:**
  - Homophobia/heterosexism
  - Gay bar/club
  - Coming out/identity

- **Demographics:**
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Social roles/responsibilities
    (e.g., parenting, civil unions)

- **Psychosocial:**
  - Depression
  - Stress

- **Interpersonal:**
  - Childhood sexual abuse
  - Intimate partner/
    domestic violence
  - Peer & partner drinking
Barriers to Prevention

- Intolerance for sexual diversity not addressed (especially for adolescents)
- Lack of positive role models
- Target marketing
- Inadequate/low visibility social services
- Lack of substance free environments for socialization
Barriers to Identification and Assessment

λ Lack of professional training/knowledge about LGBT population
λ Distrust of treatment systems by LGBT individuals
λ Lack of unbiased, population-sensitive assessment tools
Barriers to Treatment/Recovery

- Stigma, homophobia, heterosexism among treatment providers and self-help groups

- Poor access to/ awareness of gay affirming support systems
Prevention Strategies

- Training professionals (police, social service providers, educators)
- Community understanding and acceptance efforts
- Support & inclusion of LGBT individuals and families in prevention efforts
- Provide structured workshops on coming out
- Establish linkages with existing LGBT organizations
Treatment Approaches

- Attend to importance of social/support networks and affirmation of identity
- Involve members of network in treatment
- Develop variety of strategies to support abstinence (avoidance of LGBT people/places/things is not an advisable option)
λ Learn about, develop linkages with lesbian/gay community, gay AA, and gay bar alternatives
λ Acknowledge sense of empowerment, self-efficacy, and personal responsibility gained from addressing problematic substance use.
Treatment Approaches (continued)

- Include measures of sexual orientation in national studies of substance abuse
- Devise methods to involve under-represented groups in AOD research
- Examine protective factors to AOD use
Treatment Approaches (continued)

- Explore lifespan risk and protective factors for LGBT persons

- Conduct treatment outcome studies to identify effective treatment approaches