

Maci Chen¹

maci@andrews.edu

¹School of Social Work, Andrews University – Research Advisors: Curtis VanderWaal, Alina Baltazar

²School of Social & Behavioral Sciences, Andrews University – Research Advisor: Duane McBride

Literature Review

College students in general tend to have high rates of substance use and abuse.^[1] Sexual minority college students show high rates of substance use and abuse.^[2] These findings are consistent across studies of sexual minority students and their relation to substances. Sexual minority populations are also more at-risk for becoming victims of sexual harassment and assault.^[3] Minority stress theory hypothesizes that LGBTQ+ students at Christian universities may face heightened stigmatization or alienation, perhaps because of Christian norms/beliefs supporting heterosexual orientation.^[4]

Hypothesis I- LGBTQ+ students at a conservative Christian university will have higher rates of substance misuse than heterosexual students.

Hypothesis II- LGBTQ+ students will have higher rates of both sexual harassment and nonconsensual sexual contact than heterosexual students.

Instruments

Data from the 2018 AU Health Risk Survey was used for our analysis. Sexual orientation, past year tobacco, marijuana, and alcohol use, nonconsensual sexual contact and sexual harassment were determined by self-report.

Methods

We conducted an IRB approved, classroom-based anonymous survey of high-risk behaviors with a representative sample of students (N=660) at a small midwestern Christian university. Forty students self-identified as LGBTQ+.

Results

Chi-square statistics, which test the difference between frequencies and whether variables are related to each other, were used to show statistically significant differences between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ students. Compared to heterosexual students, LGBTQ+ students were significantly more likely to have used tobacco, marijuana, and alcohol in the past year. In addition, compared to heterosexual students, they were significantly more likely to have been sexually harassed as well as had non-consensual sexual contact.

Past year substance use		Not at all or Tried it Once % (N)	Once/Month, Twice/Month, or Once/Week % (N)	3 Times/Week or Daily % (N)
Past year: how often have you used tobacco?	Heterosexual	95.9 (585)	2.6 (16)	1.5 (9)
	LGBTQ+	87.5 (35)	2.5 (1)	8.4 (4)
Past year: how often have you used marijuana?	Heterosexual	94.2 (574)	4.6 (28)	1.2 (7)
	LGBTQ+	87.5 (35)	2.5 (1)	10 (4)
Past year: how often have you used alcohol other than a few sips?	Heterosexual	80.8 (492)	17.1 (104)	2.1 (13)
	LGBTQ+	72.5 (29)	27.5 (11)	0

Tobacco: N= 650; P= .001; Marijuana: N= 649; P= .000; Alcohol: N= 649; P= .002

Since coming to Andrews University as a student, has anyone engaged in non-consensual sexual contact with you?	Yes % (N)	No % (N)
Heterosexual	5.6 (33)	94.4 (553)
LGBTQ+	20.5 (8)	79.5 (31)

N= 625; P= .000

Since coming to Andrews University as a student, how often has anyone sexually harassed you?	0 % (N)	1 % (N)	2-3 % (N)	4-5 % (N)	6+ % (N)
Heterosexual	85.2 (495)	6.0 (35)	6.0 (35)	0.9 (5)	1.9 (11)
LGBTQ+	64.9 (24)	16.2 (6)	10.8 (4)	2.7 (1)	5.4 (2)

N= 618; P= .020

Discussion

Frequency of substance use, nonconsensual sexual contact, and sexual harassment are consistently higher among LGBTQ+ students compared to heterosexual students. The increased use of substances and exposure to sexual harassment and nonconsensual sexual contact among LGBTQ+ populations at religious universities has not been studied to the same degree in previous research.

These heightened rates may be attributed to social marginalization and victimization because of factors such as unwelcoming campus environments, past traumatic experiences, and sexual minority stigma. These types of stressful environments may lead to greater likelihood of engaging in substance abuse or becoming victims of sexual harassment and abuse.^[5]

Our campus needs to be aware of the struggles that face LGBTQ+ students, especially in a Christian environment. This support must specifically serve marginalized students who are dealing with substance abuse and/or sexual misconduct. It is vital to provide these types of resources for the health of these students. The campus must also be made aware of and educated about LGBTQ+ issues in order to become a safer, more welcoming community.

References

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