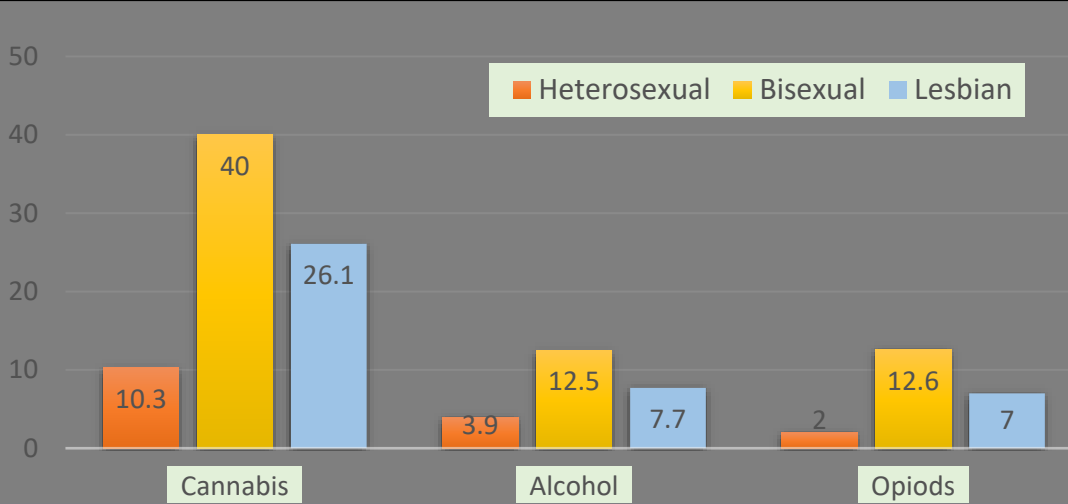


# Bisexual Women and Substance Misuse

## US Women's Substance Use Rates by Sexual Orientation<sup>1</sup>



### BISEXUAL WOMEN: VULNERABILITY ELEVATES SUBSTANCE MISUSE

- Bisexual women use alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and opioids at higher rates than both heterosexual and lesbian women.<sup>1</sup>
- This disparity is thought to rise from a complex mix of factors, including hypersexualization, invisibility and erasure, higher rates of sexual trauma<sup>2</sup>, and “double discrimination” from both the general population and LGBTQ community.<sup>1, 3</sup>
- A “vulnerability index” measure showed that bisexual women are more likely to be uninsured, in poorer health, and to have more unmet mental health treatment needs than other women.<sup>4</sup>
- Bisexual individuals of all genders report they are less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to care providers and others in their lives, compounding stress and compromising effective treatment.<sup>5</sup>

### BISEXUAL HEALTH DISPARITIES<sup>3, 7</sup>

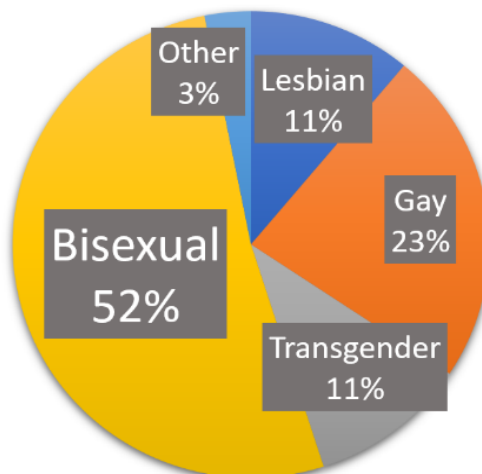
- Higher rates of anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders
- Higher rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections, heart disease, and cancer.
- Higher levels of sexualization -- being objectified or fetishized by others
- Higher reported self-harm
- Lower levels of social support, which contribute to low help-seeking and an increase in mental health issues.
- Higher rates of intimate partner violence and low self-esteem
- Higher rates of sexual harassment in the workplace and in public
- Higher rates of substance use, including cigarette smoking and binge drinking
- An increase in eating disorders
- Markedly higher rates of poverty
- Disproportionate incarceration and justice system involvement

### US Population: Gallup Poll<sup>6</sup>

November 2021

“Which of the following do you identify yourself to be? Straight/Heterosexual; Lesbian; Gay; Bisexual; Transgender?”<sup>1</sup>

Results = 105.4% due to multiple responses, e.g. respondent identifies as both “Transgender” and “Lesbian”.



Central East (HHS Region 3)

PTTC

**SAMHSA**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

## THE BISEXUAL UMBRELLA<sup>8</sup>

**BISEXUAL:** A sexual orientation term with many personal interpretations, including:

- Attraction to men and women
- Attraction to the same gender and other genders
- Attraction regardless of sex or gender

*“The potential to be attracted — romantically and/or sexually — to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.”*

-- Bisexual Advocate Robyn Ochs

**PANSEXUAL:** “Pan” = “All”; a sexual desire that is not limited to people of a particular gender identity or sexual orientation.

**QUEER:** An umbrella word used to refer to all those with a non-heterosexual orientation; may also include all with non-cisgender gender identities.

**POLYSEXUAL:** Sexual attraction to more than one, but not all, genders. For example: someone may seek to date women, transgender and nonbinary people, and queer men, but never straight men.

**FLUID:** An orientation that is not fixed in any direction and may include partners of various sexes or genders over time.

**HETRO- or HOMOFLEXIBLE:** A word for someone with primarily hetero- or homosexual orientation who engages in situational bisexual behavior.

**BI-CURIOUS:** A primarily heterosexual individual seeking a same-gender sexual experience. This term is rejected by some in the LGBTQ community who feel it trivializes or invalidates the existence of bisexuality.

1 Gattuso, R. (2021, September 22). *Why are bisexual women at a higher risk of substance abuse?* Talkspace

2 Kates, J. U. R., Beamesderfer, Dawson, L., & Salganicoff, A. (2018, May 3). *Health and access to care and coverage for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in the U.S. - health challenges.* KFF.

## WHO ARE “BISEXUAL WOMEN”?

Bisexual people are the largest sector of the LGBTQ+ community, according to numerous polls and research studies<sup>6</sup>. However, who counts and who gets counted may vary widely.

Many people behaviorally engage with sexual partners of multiple genders, but may consider their identity exclusively heterosexual or lesbian/gay. Others may have sexual contact with only one person or only one gender, but claim bisexual as their core orientation. Some people may experience sexual desires across the gender spectrum and prefer a different term like “pansexual”, “queer”, or “heteroflexible” which will not be represented in “bisexual” study results.

Studies have also reported that behaviorally bisexual individuals may find sexual orientation a less important part of their overall identity than other sexual and gender minority people<sup>2</sup>, sharing sentiments like “I don’t like labels” or “I just love People.” Finally, the category of “women” can also be complex, as some studies include transgender women and nonbinary individuals in the sample population while others focus on cisgender women only.

## MYTHS AND MICROAGGRESSIONS<sup>9</sup>

Due to stigma and stereotyping, bisexual women frequently face humiliating and dehumanizing experiences such as:

- Encountering the false belief that bisexuality does not exist.
- Feeling a constant need to “come out” to people or explain bisexuality.
- Facing interpersonal issues related to the myth that bisexuals are untrustworthy.
- Encountering stereotypes that bisexuals are immoral or hedonistic.
- Experiencing emotional exhaustion caused by stigma and discrimination.

3 Heinze, J. L. (2021, September 22). *Disparities in bi+ health and sexual violence.* National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

4 Rosner, B., Neicun, J., Yang, J. C., & Roman-Urrestarazu, A. (2020, December 17). *Substance use among sexual minorities in the US – linked to inequalities and unmet need for mental health treatment? results from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).* Journal of Psychiatric Research.

5 Parker, K. (2020, May 30). *Among LGBT Americans, bisexuals stand out when it comes to identity, acceptance.* Pew Research Center.

6 Jones, J. M. (2021, November 20). *LGBT identification rises to 5.6% in latest U.S. estimate.* Gallup.com.

7 Ruthstrom, E. (2014, October 3). *Bisexual Health Awareness Month draws attention to community's urgent health needs.* National LGBTQ Task Force.

8 Corey E. Flanders (Special Issue Editor) (2017) Under the Bisexual Umbrella: Diversity of Identity and Experience, Journal of Bisexuality, 17:1, 1-6,

9 Social Work License Map. (2021, June 29). *How to be an ally to people who are bisexual.* Social Work License Map.

