

## **Cultural practices of alcohol, tobacco and vape use among lesbian, bisexual, and queer women: Initial findings from the QSOX Study**

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**Introduction:** Alcohol and tobacco consumption are prevalent among lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women in Australia. However, understanding of the social and cultural practices that influence LBQ women's substance use and perceptions is limited. Additionally, factors contributing to or preventing help-seeking for substance use among LBQ women are poorly understood.

**Methods:** This project uses a longitudinal qualitative approach to examine the roles of alcohol, tobacco, and vaping in the everyday lives of LBQ women in Victoria and New South Wales. The first phase of interviews was conducted with a sample of 60 LBQ women between the ages of 18-72, recruited through targeted sampling via social media and LGBTQ-community organisations.

**Results:** Initial findings reveal that alcohol, tobacco, and vaping serve various functions in LBQ women's lives, including stress and pain management, self-expression, and fostering social connections. Heavier drinking was sometimes aligned with mental ill-health and challenging life circumstances, though this was not always the case. Alcohol consumption and smoking were seen to lower social inhibitions, helping women to express their gender identity and same-gender attraction. However, gendered and heteronormative representations of problematic substance use can impede recognition of personal use as problematic and hinder help-seeking.

**Conclusion:** Preliminary results highlight the multifaceted nature of LBQ women's substance use, extending beyond the traditional explanations of minority stress, emphasising the need to explore alternative approaches for understanding and addressing substance use within this population.

**Implications for practice or policy:** Policy and service providers should ensure that substance use support and interventions are inclusive and culturally competent for LBQ women. This includes acknowledging the unique experiences and challenges faced by this population and tailoring programs to their specific needs. Efforts should be made to address stigma associated with substance use among LBQ women, including challenging stereotypes that may prevent LBQ women from recognising their own substance use as problematic and seeking help.

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