Patterns of and factors associated with polysubstance use among community-engaged lesbian, bisexual, and queer women in Sydney, Australia: A latent class analysis

Julie Mooney-Somers
Julie Ramsay
Rachel Deacon
Erin Cvejic

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Methods

Participants: community engaged LBQ women from in and around Sydney

Data collection: biennial SWASH Survey collected during the 2020 Mardi Gras Festival (n=1558; mean age: 35 years)

Analysis: latent class analysis using nine indicators of tobacco, alcohol, and drug use frequency in the preceding six months. We examined associations between class profiles and demographic characteristics.
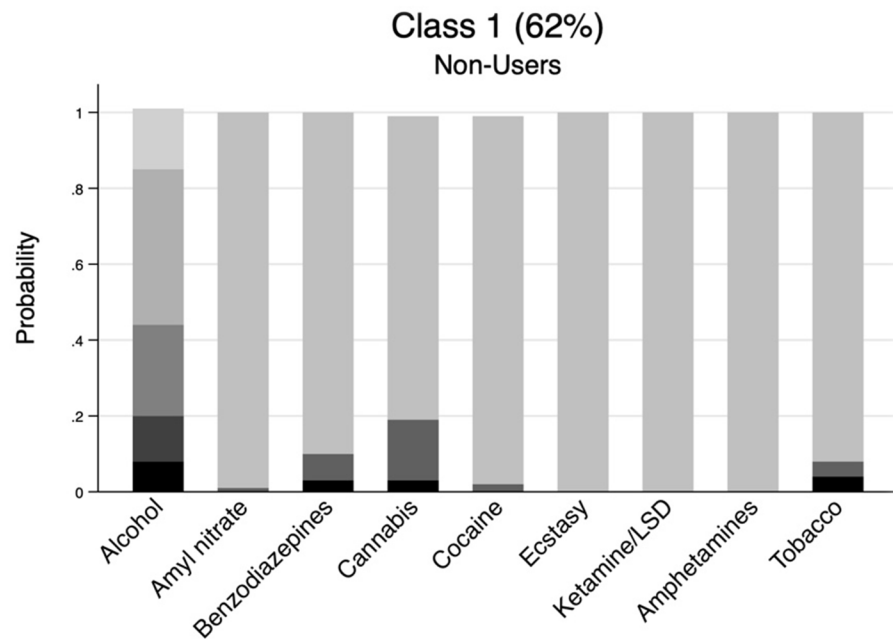
No/low substance use class

62% of respondents

The least frequent or non-uses of alcohol; at most drank alcohol weekly or more but binged rarely.

A small probability of tobacco use

A small probability of infrequent cannabis use

Most likely to be lesbian, then bisexual, then queer

Class 1 (62%)
Non-Users

Occasional party drug use
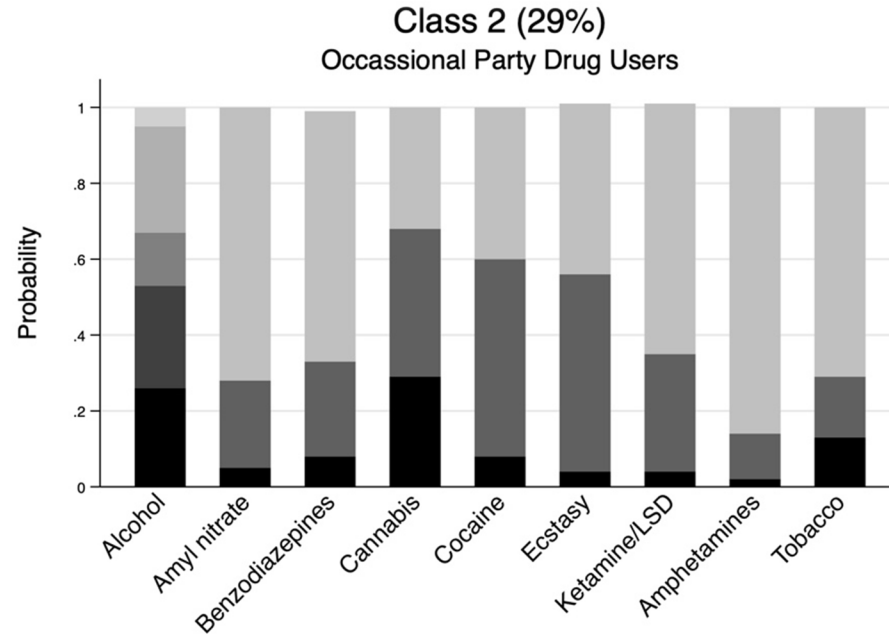
29% of respondents.

Drank alcohol weekly or more, with more frequent bingeing monthly or less.

More frequent cannabis use, with occasional cocaine and ecstasy use, and some use of ketamine/LSD, tranquillisers and amyl nitrate.

Most likely to be queer, then multiple identities, and bisexual

Having a regular partner increased the odds of being in this class

Odds of recently being concerned about illicit drug use 10 times higher, and about alcohol 2 times higher, than no/low use class

Class 2 (29%)
Occasional Party Drug Users

Frequent Multi-Drug Use

9% of respondents

Drank alcohol weekly or more with heavy bingeing

High probability of frequent cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy use, and occasional use of amyl nitrate, tranquilizers, and meth/amphetamines

More likely to smoke tobacco

Most likely to be queer, bisexual, lesbian

Odds of recently being concerned about illicit drug use 40 times higher, and about alcohol 4times higher, than no/low use class

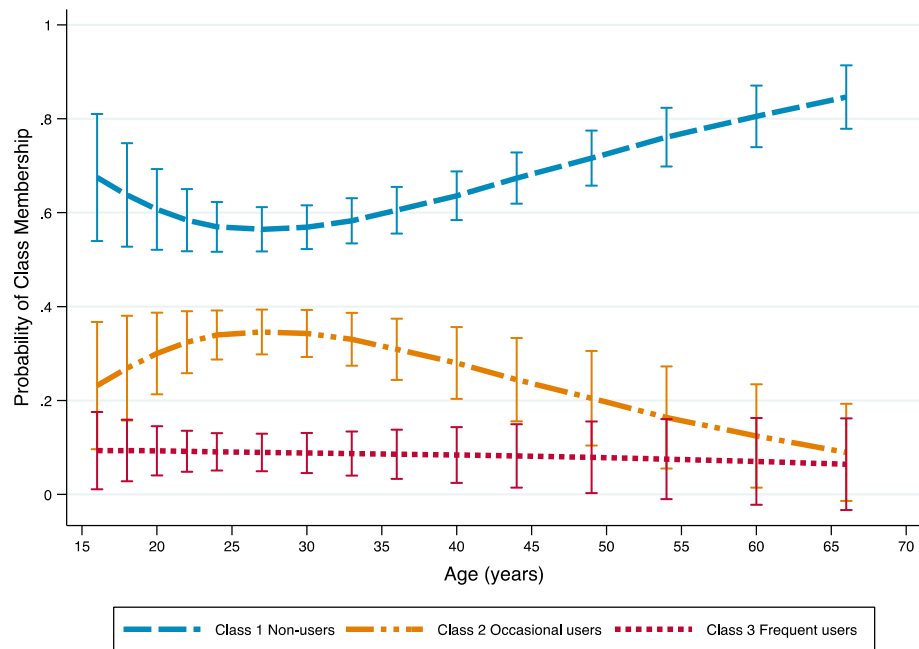### Class 3 (9%)
Frequent Multi-Drug Users
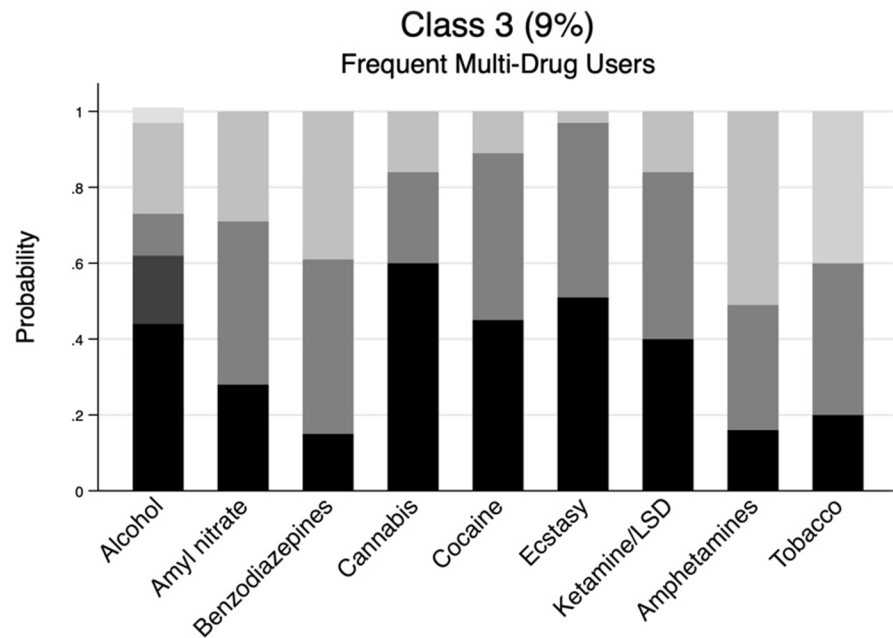
Age

Probability of being in the no/low use class decreases with age (lowest 24-30yo), then increases

Probability of being in the occasional party drug use class increases with age (highest 24-30yo), then decreases.

Probability of being in the frequent multi drug use class remains steady

Income

Probability of being in the no/low use class decreases with income

Probability of being in the occasional party drug use class increases with income, with a noticeable jump between nil and $60k.

After a small jump between nil and 60K), probability of being in the frequent multi drug use class is steady
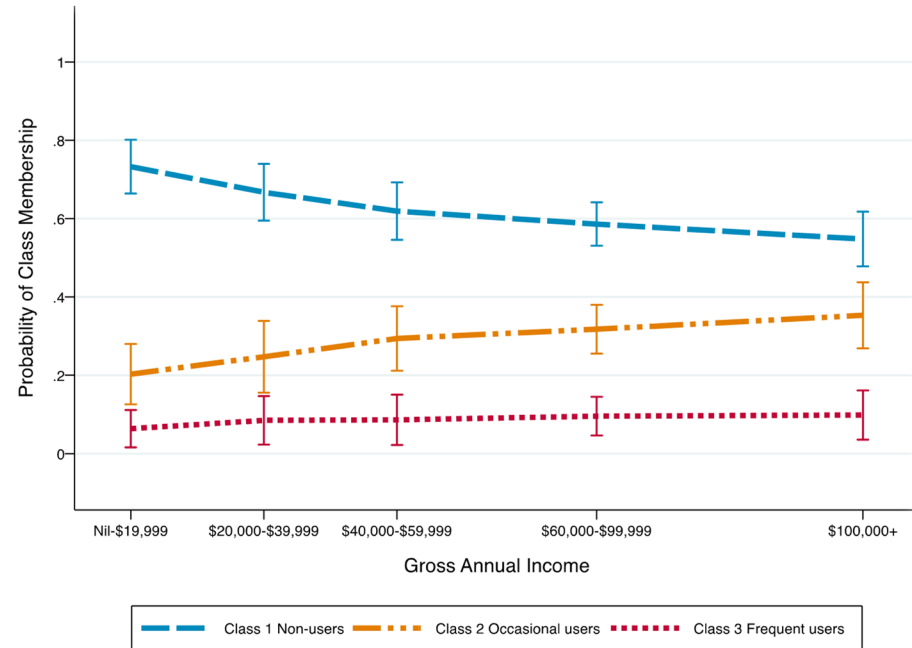
Discussion points

Heterogeneity within LBQ women

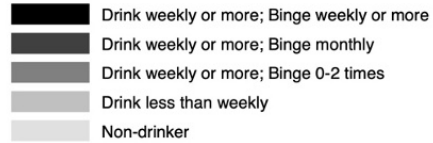Alcohol and .. *Not* tobacco (cannabis; ??now vaping)

Supports emerging evidence that LBQ women do not 'age out' of polysubstance in the same way as heterosexual women

A lot of concern around drug use (but not more likely to have recently sought help).

Designing polysubstance use harm reduction and treatment?

LEGEND

Alcohol Frequency past 6 months

■ Drink weekly or more; Binge weekly or more
■ Drink weekly or more; Binge monthly
■ Drink weekly or more; Binge 0-2 times
■ Drink less than weekly
□ Non-drinker

Illicit Drugs Frequency past 6 months

■ 6+ times
■ 1-5 times
□ Never

Tobacco Frequency of Smoking

■ Daily smoker
■ Non-daily smoker
□ Non-smoker

What is SWASH?

Provides insights into the health of lesbian, bisexual, queer and other non-heterosexual identifying women who engage with LGBTQ communities in and around Sydney.

Conducted every two years since 1996.

Conducted in person and online during the 2022 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras season.

Recruitment by peer recruiters and online through Facebook and Instagram
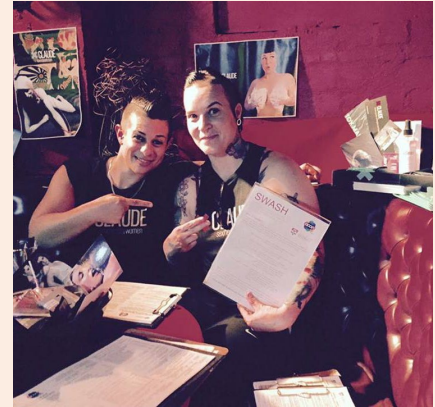
SWASH sample substance use

- 81% did not currently smoke
- 89% drank alcohol with 34% drinking alcohol weekly or more and bingeing 5 or more drinks on any one occasion monthly or more.
- Cannabis (synthetic or natural) was the most common illicit drug used (39%), followed by cocaine (27%) and ecstasy (25%)
- Cannabis was also the most frequently used illicit drug with 16% of respondents using cannabis 6+ times over the past 6 months.
- 55% of respondents reported using any illicit drug and 38% reported using two or more illicit drugs over the last 6 months

Background

Lesbian, bisexual and queer women use tobacco, illicit drugs and alcohol at significantly higher rates compared to heterosexual women with a disproportionate health burden associated with this elevated use.

A few Australian studies have examined polysubstance use among young people but none among adult sexual minority women.

Understanding polysubstance use among sexual minority women specifically has implications for the development and delivery of interventions and treatment and health promotion efforts.

Conclusion: Will LBQ women get left behind again?

- Remember the long lag between smoking in the gen pop dropping and smoking among LBQ women?
- A long time to break the strong connection between LBQ women and tobacco; it was normal, even expected to smoke.
- We need to be cognisant of how LBQ/LGBTQ communities use substances and how substance use becomes embedded in culture.
- Be cautious about long term health impacts of vaping

What research do we need to be doing NOW?

What are LBQ women's support and education needs?