

## **Substance use among trans, non-binary and gender diverse (trans) youth in Australia: burden, correlates, and motives**

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**Introduction:** Current research regarding the burden and correlates of substance use among trans youth in Australia is limited by small sample sizes or narrow varieties of correlates and/or substances. Existing theories of increased substance use among this population do not incorporate trans youth's own accounts of substance use motives.

**Method:** Using data from the Trans Pathways survey of trans young people aged 14-25 years in Australia (N=859, M<sub>age</sub> = 19.4), we estimated prevalence ratios of recent substance use (tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs) and substance use disorder diagnoses, using multivariate logistic models to test associations with 18 interpersonal factors. Participants' open-ended responses regarding substance use motives were qualitatively analysed using thematic analysis with an interpretative phenomenological approach.

**Results:** Prevalence of substance use disorder diagnosis was 13.5% whereas recent substance use ranged from 13.5% to 72.4% depending on substance. Over half of participants reported recent substance use alone. Trans men and non-binary youth were most at risk of substance use disorder diagnosis and recent substance use. Highest risk of recent substance use was observed among trans youth who experienced discrimination, intimate partner abuse, peer rejection, and lack of family support (ORs ranging 1.5 to 3.0). Four multi-levelled themes of substance use motives were identified: circumstantial use, somatic use, feeling better about oneself and one's life, and harm reduction.

**Conclusions:** While substance use among trans youth is largely circumstantial and hedonistic, trans youth may use substances to cope with sleep difficulties, depression/anxiety, and cisnormativity, including delays to accessing gender-affirming care.

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