

# Substance Use, Survivorship of Crime-Related Harm, and Interactions with the Justice System: A Comparison of LGBTQ+ and Cisgender Heterosexual People in Australia

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**Introduction:** Substance use and experiences of violent or traumatic crime often intersect. For those who are intoxicated during a crime, there can be added complexities in psychological recovery, interactions with legal systems, and access to appropriate support. Research that captures the impact these experiences have on LGBTQ+ individuals, compared to cisgender heterosexual individuals, remains limited. This study examines patterns of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use, exposure to crime-related trauma and justice system experiences, and associated psychological wellbeing among LGBTQ+ and cisgender heterosexual people in Australia.

**Methods:** An anonymous cross-sectional online survey (N=253) collected data on AOD use (AUDIT, DUDIT), psychological distress (K10), perceptions of intoxicated victims of crime, and justice system interactions, including past experiences of crime-related harm. Participants were grouped as LGBTQ+ (29.6%) or cisgender heterosexual (70.4%) based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Non-parametric tests and regression models compared outcomes across groups.

**Results:** Across the sample, 81.3% reported lifetime alcohol use and 62.2% reported lifetime other drug use, with 61.3% using substances to cope with stress or trauma. Severe alcohol use was more common among cisgender heterosexual participants. Almost two-thirds of participants experienced violent or traumatic crime, with one-quarter under the influence of substances at the time. LGBTQ+ participants were more likely to report difficulties in processing prior experiences of crime, alongside higher levels psychological distress and identity-related factors that influenced their engagement with the justice system.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Cisgender heterosexual participants were more likely to exhibit severe alcohol use, while LGBTQ+ participants reported greater psychological distress and identity-related barriers to justice seeking. Clinical services must address substance-related harms and trauma exposure across all populations, while providing identity-affirming healthcare.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** Identity-affirming, trauma-informed care remains critical to improving service engagement and recovery outcomes, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals navigating crime-related trauma.

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