

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG MSM



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## ABSTRACT

The prevalence of substance abuse and risky behaviors has been researched extensively over the last few decades. Less often however, does research specifically look at substance abuse among men who have sex with men (MSM). Moreover, the limited research that looks at the MSM population focuses in on older MSM. To address this gap in the literature through a minority-stress lens, the current study aimed to look at the link between substance use and risky sexual behaviors among young MSM. This secondary data analysis examined cross sectional data from the 2015-2018 Multilevel Influences on HIV and Substance Use RADAR Cohort. The subsample for the current study (N = 1,026) consisted of all MSM under the age of thirty who participated in surveys. Overall, the study found a positive relationship between substance use and risky sexual behavior among young MSM. While there are resources available aimed at targeting substance abuse issues; the current study suggests the need for greater awareness and availability of resources for young MSM dealing with substance abuse and high-risk behavior issues.

## INTRODUCTION

### Significance of Study

- While risky sexual behavior is prevalent among the general population, research shows that there are higher rates of risky behavior within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community .
- However, we also see that MSM have the high rates of risky behavior (Halkitis, Parsons, & Stirratt, 2001).

### Purpose of the Research

- The purpose of this study is to link substance use, risky sexual behavior and MSM males together to answer the following question:

### Research Question

- Will higher levels of substance use lead to unsafe sexual practices among men who have sex with men?

### Hypothesis

- Higher levels of substance use will be positively associated with unsafe sex practices among men who have sex with men.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Substance Abuse & Risky Sexual Behavior among General Population

- A sample study of 243 students who screened positive for alcohol or drugs, nearly 62% of them reported having had multiple sexual partners while high/drunk; 35% reported that they had not used a condom while high/drunk in the last six months

### Substance Abuse in MSM Males

- Marshal and colleagues (2008) conducted a study on the use of substances among adolescents and found that substance abuse was 190% higher in LGBTQ adolescent males than non-LGBTQ adolescents males.

## Substance Abuse & Risky Sexual Behaviors in MSM

- A study with a sample size of 566 males revealed that nearly 62% of the MSM had engaged in a sexual risky act in the past 6 months whereas only 41% of non-MSM had engaged in a risky sexual act such as the infrequent use of condoms during sex, multiple sexual partners and selling themselves for sex (Hoff et al., 2010).

### Research Gaps

- Most research published on substance and alcohol abuse has been on white, middle-class, and well-educated gay men that is often done by convenience sampling (Theodore, 2011).
- Self-report measures are frequently not always accurate, especially in the high-risk populations who engage in risky sexual behavior, as they tend to under-report some of their behaviors (Hess et al., 2017).

## METHODS

### Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- The current study is a secondary data analysis on the Multilevel Influences of HIV and Substance Use in young men who have sex with men (YMSM) Cohort (RADAR) study.
- The original RADAR study ran a little over two and a half years with beginning data being acquired in February 2015 and concluding in September 2017 (Mustanski, 2020).

### Sample and Sampling Method

- The original study participants included two pre-existing cohorts of sexual minorities that were recruited from Northwestern University
- Dataset was restricted and only cisgender males 16-29 were sampled (N = 1,026).

### Measures

#### Substance Abuse

- Substance abuse was measured by using the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification (AUDIT) Test and the Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test (CUDIT).

#### Risky Sexual Practices

- Risky sexual behavior was measured by utilizing two scaled questions. The first question asks for "lifetime number of vaginal or anal sex partners". The second question relates to the first question as it asks for "lifetime number of condomless vaginal or anal sex partners".

## RESULTS

### Spearman's Rho Correlation

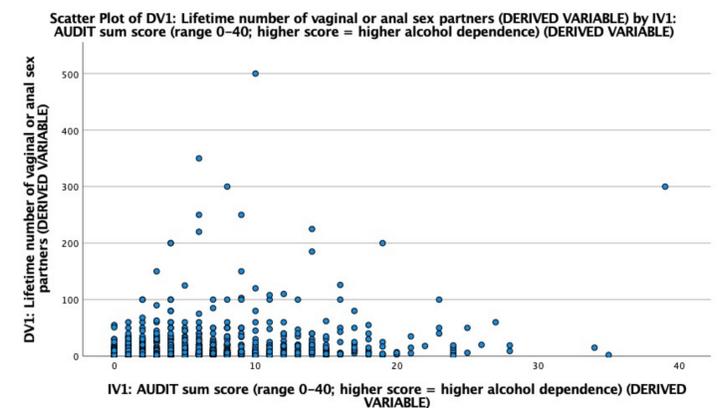
- The results indicated a significantly positive relationship between substance use and lifetime number of sexual partners  $r_s = .162, p < .01$ ; and substance use, and lifetime unprotected sexual partners  $r_s = .127, p < .01$ .

Table 3

Correlation Analysis of Substance Use/Abuse and Risky Sexual Behavior

Independent and Dependent Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
AUDIT sum score	5.99	5.36	-			
CUDIT sum score	6.12	6.27	.263**	-		
Lifetime number of vaginal or anal sex partners	16.35	34.63	.274**	.162**	-	
Lifetime number of condomless vaginal or anal sex partners	6.84	17.69	.234**	.127**	.736**	-

Note: \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$



## CONCLUSIONS

### Summary of Findings

- The study's results indicated a positive relationship between substance use and risky sexual behavior among MSM.

### Strengths/Limitations

- Strengths of the study include its large sample size.
- Weakness include not considering transgender males as the dataset was restricted

### Implications for Practice and Policy

- The current study's findings also provide significant implications for school social workers. School social workers will have more insight when working with young male students who disclose that they are sexually active with other males. It is important for the student to have a positive experience with the social worker as the school social worker may be the first contact whom the student has received services from.