

# Lesbian and gay young people in England twice as likely to smoke and drink alcohol

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Young people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are twice as likely to have smoked than their heterosexual peers, according to new research published in *BMJ Open*. Lesbian and gay young people were also more likely to drink alcohol frequently and more hazardously.

The interdisciplinary research team comprised researchers from five UK Universities (UCL, University of Cambridge, London Metropolitan University, De Montfort University Leicester and Brunel University), a doctor working in General Practice and a consultant from Public Health England.

The researchers looked at data from over 7,600 participants collected from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. This [representative sample](#) of school pupils entered the study at age 13/14 and were followed for five years. All the participants were asked about their cigarette smoking and alcohol use. At age 18/19, they were asked about their [sexual identity](#). This is the first UK study in which representative data has been available. Most previous research in this area has come from the US.

Young people who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual (3.5% of the sample) were around twice as likely as heterosexuals to have smoked during the follow-up.

Gay or lesbian participants were more likely to say that they drank alcohol frequently (more than weekly), and report hazardous alcohol

drinking patterns (frequent intoxication).

Bisexual participants were more likely to have smoked but had similar alcohol use patterns to their [heterosexual peers](#).

Lead researcher Dr Gareth Hagger-Johnson, from the UCL Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, said: "Our research shows that despite recent social change, young people today who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual are twice as likely to have smoked as their heterosexual peers. Gay and lesbian young people also appear to have more frequent and more hazardous alcohol drinking patterns than [heterosexuals](#). Smoking and [drinking alcohol](#) frequently and hazardously can lead to chronic disease in later life, and so we should be worried about these health inequalities in this minority group and the longer term consequences they may face."

"From a public health perspective, we need to understand why young gay, lesbian and bisexual people are more likely to engage in risky health behaviours than their heterosexual peers," continued Dr Hagger-Johnson. "This will need to involve longitudinal research, following a large sample of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people over time. We are concerned that 'minority stress', resulting from homophobia and heterosexism, might lead people to self-medicate symptoms of anxiety and depression with cigarettes and alcohol."

**More information:** Sexual orientation identity in relation to smoking history and alcohol use at age 18/19: cross-sectional associations from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), *BMJ* Open. [bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/8/e002810.abstract](https://open.bmj.com/content/3/8/e002810.abstract)

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