

SUBSTANCE USE BEHAVIOURS AMONG SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES WITH A HISTORY OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND NARRATIVE-SYNTHESIS

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BACKGROUND

- **Substance use** is one of the **key drivers** of enhanced susceptibility of key populations, such as sexual gender minorities (SGM) to **HIV and other sexual transmitted infections (STI)**.
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) impact behavioural and mental health outcomes.
- SGM face **disproportionately higher rates** of **ACEs and substance use** compared to heterosexual and cisgender individuals.

Objectives

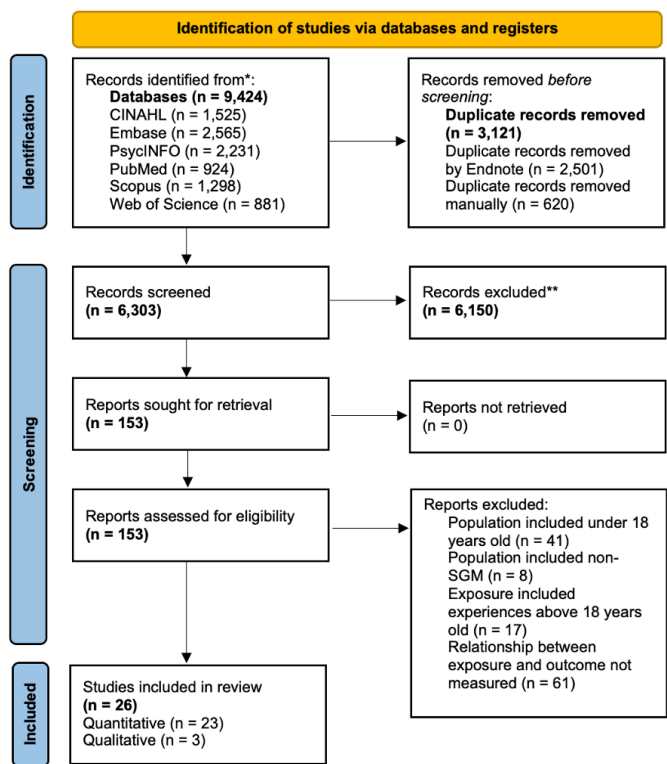
- To identify associations between ACEs and substance use outcomes in SGM adults
- Identify other risk factors of substance use and how these intersect with ACEs

RESULTS

- **Total studies: 26 (23 quantitative, 3 qualitative)**
- Participants $N=33,039$ from 5 countries, United States ($n=19$), South Africa ($n=4$), Canada ($n=1$), Cambodia ($n=1$), Lebanon ($n=1$).
- SGM sub-group breakdown: **17(65%) GBMSM**, **5(20%) LBQ women**, and **4(15%) transgender persons**.
- Of the **23 quantitative studies**:
 - ACEs examined were **childhood sexual abuse (CSA) (95%)**, **childhood physical abuse (CPA) (43%)**, **emotional/psychological abuse (26%)**, **emotional and physical neglect (13%)** and **household dysfunction (17%)**.
 - **15(65%)** reported **drug-related** outcomes, **16(70%)** reported **alcohol-related** outcomes, and **2(9%)** reported **tobacco-smoking** outcomes.
- Of the **3 qualitative studies**:
 - All reported **CSA**, and included other ACEs associated with **early awareness of sexual orientation** such as **childhood heterosexism**, **abusive family relationships**, **bullying and mistreatment by non-relatives**.
 - Substance use outcomes included both **drug** and **alcohol** use.

METHODS

- Systematic review conducted per PRSIMA-P guidelines: **double-screened, double-extracted**. Protocol registered with PROSPEPRO (CRD42024493936).
- Six databases searched: PubMed, EMBASE, CINAHL, Scopus, PsycINFO and Web of Science from inception to 13 April 2025.
- Inclusion criteria: Peer-reviewed epidemiological and qualitative studies on **SGM adults (population)**, **ACEs (exposure)** and **substance use (outcome)**.
- Quality assessment using MMAT, with all studies meeting acceptable quality threshold.
- Synthesis: Narrative and thematic synthesis due to heterogeneity of studies.



KEY FINDINGS

- Consistent strong associations between **ACEs, especially CSA** to negative substance use outcomes in SGM adults.
- While CSA most frequently studied, **emotional abuse**, **household dysfunction**, and **cumulative ACE** exposure is associated with increased substance use.
- **Intersectional influences** on substance use outcomes: *age, race, financial status, education, psychological factors, environment, SGM-identity specific stigma, interpersonal relationships, engaging in transactional sex.*
- Qualitative data supported and expanded on quantitative findings.
 - **Social factors** such as relationships with partners also led to substance use outcomes.
 - **Marginalization due to SGM identities** in childhood from family, peers, and broader communities were stressors and lead to **coping through substance use**.
 - This oppression was **also experienced in treatment seeking**, and services failed them as sexual and racial minorities.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings highlight three critical areas for intervention:

- 1) the need for **early intervention on SGM persons experiencing ACEs** before the age of 18,
- 2) the need for **trauma-informed care** addressing ACEs in substance use treatment, and
- 3) **person-centred care models** addressing **intersectional challenges**.

This emphasizes the importance of developing targeted prevention and interventions that address both the psychosocial and substance and sexual health needs of young SGM individuals.