

COVID's effect on mental health, drinking, and employment in heterosexuals compared to sexual minorities



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Introduction

- ❖ In a study measuring depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse, and suicidality contributing to decreased mental health in sexual minorities comparison to heterosexuals, with bisexuals having the worst distress of all the sexual minorities (Jorm et al,2002).
- ❖ Researchers monitored heavier drinking contexts and sexual orientation, they found sexual minorities were more likely to spend time in higher drinking scenarios compared to heterosexuals; gay men spent more time than any other orientation in heavy drinking contexts (Trocki et al, 2005).
- ❖ Analyses into depression and anxiety related to the beginning COVID pandemic in sexual minorities, identified that depression and anxiety in sexual minorities increased possibly related to pre-COVID financial and health issues(Flentje et al, 2020).

Hypothesis: Sexual minorities are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance use due to COVID than heterosexuals of the same gender and age.



Methods

Participants

- ❖ N = 212 participants were recruited through pairing of heterosexual participants to sexual minority participants of the same age and gender. Ages ranged from 22 to 85, with a mean of 43.23 (SD = 12.01).
- ❖ 53.3% of participants were male.
- ❖ 88.3% Caucasian, 3.3%, 5.1% African American, 4.7% Asian, & 1.9% Other. 9.4% were Hispanic.
- ❖ The sexual orientations of the participants were: 50% heterosexual, 23.4% bisexual, 22.9% lesbian/gay, 2.3% pansexual, & 1.4% other. 81.3% were married, 14.5% were in a long-term relationship of life partnership, & 4.2% were engaged.

Procedures

- ❖ Participants were asked to complete a survey.

Measures

- ❖ **Perceived Stress Scale - Short** (PSSS; Cohen & Williamson): participants were asked how often during the past month that they had experienced symptoms such as "In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?" on a scale of never (0) to very often (4).
- ❖ **Job Stress** (JS; Netemeyer, Maxham, & Pullig, 2005): participants rated statements like "problems associated with work have kept me awake at night" and "I feel fidgety or nervous because of my job" from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).
- ❖ **Mood and Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire** (MASQ; Watson & Clark, 1991): items on anxiety and depression symptoms during the past month such as "felt uneasy" and "blamed myself for a lot of things" were scaled not at all (1) to extremely (5).
- ❖ **Three-Item Loneliness Scale** (TILS; Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2004): participants were asked about how lonely they were in the past month with questions like "How often do you feel left out?"

Results

Variable	Heterosexual M (SD)	Sexual Minority M (SD)	Difference
Depression	1.82 (.96)	2.82 (1.01)	3.57***
Anxiety	1.80 (.87)	2.20 (.92)	3.37***
Perceived Stress	1.42 (.76)	1.73 (.72)	3.09**
Job Stress	3.11 (1.62)	3.84 (1.61)	3.33**
Loneliness	7.48 (4.91)	8.99 (5.09)	2.24*
COVID threat	3.94 (1.73)	4.35 (1.84)	1.7
COVID finance	3.28 (2.20)	3.45 (2.10)	.61
COVID resource	3.24 (1.93)	3.93 (1.94)	2.63*
COVID psych	2.79 (1.82)	3.70 (1.99)	3.52***
Drinking to deal with COVID	2.58 (1.80)	3.56 (1.98)	3.82***
Conflict since COVID	2.45 (1.74)	2.85 (1.89)	1.63
Stress due to COVID	3.42 (1.97)	4.28 (2.03)	3.18 *
Drinking to cope with depression	1.77 (.99)	2.42 (1.27)	4.37***
Drinking to cope with anxiety	2.39 (.99)	2.87 (1.14)	3.53***
Couple Satisfaction	19.58 (4.44)	19.18 (4.63)	-0.621
Essential worker	N=9 (4.21%)	N=9 (4.21%)	.000

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Discussion

- ❖ Sexual minorities did show a significantly higher ($p < .001$) occurrence of depression, anxiety, COVID psych, drinking to deal with COVID, and drinking to cope with depression & anxiety compared to heterosexuals of the same age and gender.

Limitations:

- ❖ It is difficult to determine if this data is due to COVID or more related to the general life stresses (Flentje et al., 2020).
- ❖ Only 18 participants identified as essential workers, and they were equally split between heterosexual and sexual minorities.
- ❖ Two pairs did not match perfectly.

Future Directions:

- ❖ Even with a large sample of white participants determining effects of the civil unrest on stress individually could be interesting.
- ❖ Determining the cause(s) of sexual minorities declined mental health and increased substance use compared to heterosexuals.

References

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