

Our Voice

Exploring alcohol use among men who have sex with men



What's the research about?

Though our work with gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM), we found there was limited understanding of the emotional, physical and sexual harms linked to the communities relationship with alcohol. We wanted to know more so we could improve how we work the gay, bisexual and other MSM and, we addressed this by carrying out peer research. In other words, we asked people with lived experience to steer and carry out research exploring gay, bisexual and other MSM's relationship with alcohol.

What did we find out

Overall, the relationship gay, bisexual and other MSM have with alcohol is complicated, with alcohol linked to both good and bad experiences. Our research found the following areas were most often talked about e=when participants were thinking about their relationship with alcohol:

Safe spaces

LGBTI+ venues were noted as safe spaces for gay, bisexual and other MSM to socialise and feel safe being themselves. However, it was highlighted that few alcohol free LGBTI+ spaces exist.

"I think there is a strong connection between alcohol and our community. Historically, safe spaces for LGBT+ people have, more often than not, been places which serve alcohol"

Social

The relationship gay, bisexual and other MSM have with alcohol and sex is different for everyone. For some, alcohol makes socialising easier while other felt it led to decisions about sex they later regretted.

"In the past it made me feel more able to have sex I didn't feel able to do it (sex) without drinking before, due to feelings of guilt and lack of confidence"

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Consent

The relationship between alcohol, sex and consent is a big consideration in gay, bisexual and other MSM sex lives. Some research participants reported making the decision not to have sex when drunk or with someone who is drunk. They also highlighted that unwanted groping and harassment was sometimes exacerbated by drinking and, often went unchallenged in LGBTI+ venues.

“ On principle I will not have sex with someone who is drunk... How is that consenting? In the past it did have an impact. Not knowing how you ended up in certain places and putting sexual health at risk.”

Health and wellbeing

Alcohol has a strong link to health and wellbeing of gay, bisexual and other MSM, with many of the research participants drawing attention to both its positive and negative impact on mental health. The research participants also noted the impact of alcohol on decision making and maintaining good relationships, with some participants relationship with alcohol changing for the better as they grow older.

“If I’ve had a stressful day sometimes I have a drink after work. This improves my health and wellbeing... if you don’t take things to excess, alcohol has and can be very beneficial to mental health and wellbeing.”

“I find that I cannot drink as much as I could and alcohol has very negative effect on my physical and mental health. I increasingly find alcohol leads to very bad anxiety the following day.”

What will we do with this research?

These are the preliminary findings of the research, as we intend to carry out a more detailed analysis of the information gathered. Part of this process will involve inviting our peer researchers to review and comment on the findings. We will then publish a more detailed briefing of this research.