

CHAPTER 6

LESBIANS AND SUBSTANCE USE

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The elevated use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs among lesbians relative to heterosexual women is a major public health concern. This chapter explores research on lesbian behavioral health, risk factors, and treatment needs.

OVERVIEW

Lesbians' substance use patterns, etiology, risk factors, and treatment are influenced by their sexual-minority status. Alcohol use by lesbians has received the most scrutiny in the research, but lesbians also have elevated rates of nicotine and illicit drug use. Risk factors include minority stress, gender and biology, gender-specific microaggressions and aggression, co-occurring disorders, socialization patterns, and interpersonal dynamics.

From a historical perspective, substance abuse treatment was developed for adult men. Interventions for lesbians are thus hampered by the lack of research on female substance use in general. Though lesbians are more likely than heterosexual women to seek treatment for a substance use problem, research on lesbian substance use interventions and modalities is sorely lacking.

KEY TERMS

Lesbian; minority stress; gender-specific treatment; gender-specific microaggression; gender-specific aggression; lesbian alcohol use; lesbian nicotine use; lesbian illicit substance use; co-occurring disorders; lesbian substance use treatment options

Shelton, Michael

Fundamentals of LGBT Substance Use Disorders: Multiple Identities, Multiple Challenges

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NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

- 1 Case study adapted from Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, *A Provider's Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals* (Rockville, Md.: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2001), 77.
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