



Mautner Project
The National Lesbian Health Organization

FACTS ABOUT LESBIANS AND SMOKING

Introduction

The government document, *Healthy People 2010* designates sexual orientation as one of six categories in which health disparities exist, yet research on tobacco use among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) populations has been negligible within the scientific and medical communities. This is true in the monitoring of smoking rates among lesbian women. However, research that does exist reveals that lesbians are more likely than heterosexual women to smoke and suffer the damaging health effects that result. (USDHHS, 2000).

General Facts on LGBT Smoking Rates

Available research as well as information from primary research conducted by the Mautner Project, The National Lesbian Health Organization, has identified the following trends regarding smoking and tobacco use among lesbians and LGBT populations.

- 34% of LGBT adults surveyed said they smoke cigarettes, as compared to 24% of heterosexual adults (Harris Interactive/Witeck-Combs Communications, 2003).
- Of those who said they smoke cigarettes, 47% of LGBT adults and 36% of heterosexual adults smoke more than one pack each day (Harris Interactive/Witeck-Combs Communications, 2003).
- Since the 1980's, evidence shows that the tobacco industry has targeted gays and lesbians via marketing, and the sponsorship of LGBT events (Stevens, 2004). In addition, data from the Mautner Project (2004) and Harris Interactive/Witeck-Combs Communications (2003) has shown that most lesbians have never seen an anti-smoking advertisement or public education awareness message targeted toward them.
- Three quarters (75%) of LGBT smokers say they have tried to quit smoking, compared to 80% of all adults. On average they have tried, and failed, to quit smoking eight times, the same frequency reported by other smokers (Harris Interactive/Witeck-Combs Communications, 2003).
- A lack of education about smoking-related health risks does not seem to explain the disparity in smoking rates. Of all participants in the May 2001 Harris Interactive/Witeck-Combs Communications survey, LGBT survey participants were the most aware of the health risks of smoking yet had the highest rates of tobacco use.

Lesbians and Smoking

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death among women, and lesbians may face the toughest fight to kick the habit.

- About 27,000 more women die of lung cancer than breast cancer. Women who smoke are at an increased risk for numerous cancers as well as increased risk for heart disease and stroke according to data from the *Valanis, et al. (2000)*.
- Women are more likely than men to smoke as a means of regulating mood and sexual minority women face more stress in their lives, according to research conducted by Michele Eliason, Ph.D., RN, of the *Lesbian Health Research Center*, and associate professor at the University of Iowa.
- Lesbians and bisexuals under 50 were more likely than heterosexuals to engage in cigarette smoking and heavy drinking (*Valanis, et al. (2000)*).
- Data from the *Women's Health Initiative* indicates that about twice as many lesbians as heterosexual women reported being "heavy" smokers (6.8-7.4% of lesbians and 3.5% of heterosexual women). Although almost 50% of the heterosexual women reported never smoking, only 25-33% of lesbians reported never smoking (*Valanis, et al., 2000*).
- According to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, lesbians are more likely to be heavy smokers than heterosexual women (*Ryan et al., 2001*).
- Smoking rates are higher in adolescent and adult lesbians than the greater population (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).
- According to the *National Lesbian Survey*, the rate of smoking among lesbians increases with age, while rates of smoking among women in the general population decline with age (*Bradford, et al., 1994*).
- In a study by the Mautner Project, older lesbians reported experiencing intense societal stigmatization and pressure to quit from both family and friends (2003). Unfortunately, this pressure tended to increase cigarette cravings as a compensatory response to stress.

Smoke Free Environments

Bars, commonly associated with smoking, are often frequented by gays and lesbians because they are often discriminated against in other settings.

- According to a national study of LGBT bars conducted by the Mautner Project (2004), 49% had sponsored smoke-free nights during the past 12 months. However, the fear of lost revenue has prevented many from considering similar events.
- Seventy percent of LGBT respondents who indicated that they prefer smoke-free bars and clubs said they would be willing to pay more for that environment compared to only 53% of heterosexual respondents (*Harris Interactive/Witeck-Combs Communications, 2003*).

Sources:

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