



An Examination of Smoking Behavior in African American Sexual and Gender Minorities

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Introduction

Tobacco use is a widespread problem among sexual and gender minorities (SGMs: including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, transsexual identity, and those with same-sex relationships, sexual encounters, and/or attraction). Tobacco use has been shown to be more prevalent among SGM adults than the general population.

African Americans who identify as SGM represent a significant minority within a minority. A lack of information about tobacco-related behaviors and knowledge in SGM African American populations is contributing to an inability to comprehensively address smoking and tobacco use in SGM African American populations.

Purpose

To more completely quantify smoking, related attitudes and knowledge, and other tobacco issues from a sample of self-identified SGM African Americans through analysis of survey data collected at four Missouri Pride Festivals during 2011.

Methods

Participants were recruited at Pride Festivals in Missouri during the summer of 2011 and using an online survey. Our advisory board, composed of SGM community leaders from throughout Missouri, assisted in posting the web-based survey on SGM sites and list servs. Eligibility included being at least 18 years old and able to read English. Participants anonymously filled out a 36-item survey assessing smoking-related attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors as well as basic demographic and health information.

A series of analyses sought to examine differences between African Americans (AA) and Whites on variables related to demographics, smoking status and attitudes about smoking in the SGM community, including:

- 1) Overall sample comparisons by race and SGM subgroup;
- 2) Comparison of AA SGM current smokers to White SGM current smokers;
- 3) Comparison of AA SGM current smokers to AA heterosexual current smokers;
- 4) Comparison of AA heterosexual current smokers to White heterosexual current smokers.

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Results

A total of 3,961 persons completed the survey; 572 (14.4%) participants were African American. Among African Americans, 480 participants (83.9%) self-identified as SGM.

This project generated a large and diverse sample, allowing for comparison of AA SGM to White SGM on smoking behaviors, opinions about smoke-free policies and basic demographic variables.

Several important differences were found between African American (AA) SGM current smokers and White SGM current smokers. The average age for AA SGM smokers was 28.8 years which was significantly younger than White SGM smokers who had an average age of 32.4 years ($p < .0001$). AA SGM smokers were significantly more likely to have only a high school education or less compared to White SGM smokers ($p = .017$), and AA SGM smokers were significantly less likely to have 4 years or more of college education ($p = < .0011$).

AA SGM smokers were significantly more likely to be trying to quit smoking than White SGM smokers ($p < .0008$). However, AA SGMs were also significantly less likely than White SGMs to become former smokers ($p < .0001$). In addition, AA SGMs were significantly more likely to allow smoking in their homes ($p < .0001$).

Table 1: Sample Comparisons by Race and SGM Subgroup

		Current Smoker	Former Smoker	Never Smoker
Lesbian	White (n=775)	40.8%	14.9%	44.3%
	AA (n = 195)	38.1%	4.1%	57.8%
Gay	White (n=967)	34.7%	16.4%	49.0%
	AA (n=156)	35.8%	6.8%	57.4%
Female Bisexual	White (n = 254)	41.6%	14.5%	43.9%
	AA (n=52)	30.8%	3.1%	66.2%
Male Bisexual	White (n= 60)	38.6%	5.7%	55.7%
	AA (n= 21)	36.4%	9.1%	54.6%
Trans	White (n= 108)	36.4%	11.9%	51.7%
	AA (n = 19)	55.0%	5.0%	40.0%
Other SGM	White (n = 145)	34.6%	15.4%	50.0%
	AA (n = 37)	28.6%	4.8%	66.7%

Table 2: Comparing SGM African American Current Smokers to SGM White Current Smokers

	AA SGM (n=197)	White SGM (n=970)	P-Value
Daily smoker	70.90%	75.90%	ns
Some days smoker	29.10%	24.10%	ns
Intention to quit	--	--	--
Trying to quit	22.00%	12.70%	$p < .0008$
Plan to quit within month	24.20%	18.90%	$p < .0008$
Thinking about (next 6 mo)	36.30%	42.40%	$p < .0008$
Don't think about quitting	17.60%	26.00%	$p < .0008$
Partner smokes - Yes	38.60%	45.70%	ns
Smoking not allowed in home	24.20%	54.40%	$p < .0001$
Support smoke-free workplaces policies - Yes	51.40%	55.30%	ns

Conclusions

Consistent with other studies, this study finds the SGM community to have higher smoking rates than the general population. Current smoking rates were not different comparing AA SGMs to White SGMs. There is a significantly higher percent of AA SGM compared to White SGM who are never smokers; however there is also a lower percent of AA former smokers compared to White former smokers within the SGM community.

The AA SGM smokers appear to have greater readiness to quit (trying to quit; planning to quit) compared to White SGM smokers. However, as demonstrated by the lower rate of former smokers (See Table 1), AA SGMs are not as successful in quitting. Variables that may explain the lack of cessation success for AA SGM smokers compared to White SGM smokers, include: lower support for comprehensive smoke-free policies and a significantly lower percent who prohibit smoking in their homes. In addition, almost 4 in 10 SGM smokers have partners who also smoke.

This study was limited to a 36-item (approximately 10 minute) survey in order to encourage participation at Pride Festivals. Future research can examine additional variables that may further explain barriers to AA SGM smoking cessation.