

# Does Sexual Orientation Relate to Health and Well-Being?

## A Propensity-Score Matched Analysis

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### Background

- Minority Stress Theory
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults aged 50+, relative to heterosexual adults, have higher rates of:
  - Mental distress<sup>1</sup>
  - Depression<sup>2</sup>
  - Smoking<sup>1,3</sup>
  - Excessive drinking<sup>1,3</sup>
  - Obesity (women only)<sup>4</sup>
  - Poor physical health<sup>1</sup>
  - Chronic conditions (e.g., stroke, heart attack)<sup>1</sup>
- Limited research on cognition in LGB older adults
- Research Question:** Do LGB older adults report poorer physical, mental (i.e., depression), and cognitive (i.e., memory) health engaging in more health risk behaviors (e.g., smoking, drinking, lack of exercise)?

### Method

#### Participants

- Health and Retirement Study (2016 Wave)
  - Unmatched: 141 LGB, 3,574 Heterosexual
  - Propensity-score matched on age, sex, and education: 140 LGB, 420 Heterosexual

#### Statistical analyses

- Chi-square and t-tests
- Binary and ordered logistic regressions
- Covariates: age (years), sex (male/female), education (highest level in years)

### Results

**Table 1.** Comparisons of LGB and Heterosexual Participants and Outcomes (Heterosexual as Reference) Before and After Propensity-Score Matching

Variables	LGB Participants (n=140) M(SD) or %	All Heterosexual Participants (n=3,574) M(SD) or %	Unmatched Sample (n=3,715) OR (95% CI)	Matched Heterosexual Participants (n=420) M(SD) or %	Matched Sample (n= 560) OR (95% CI)
Age	53.83 (2.30)	53.72 (2.36)	-	53.76 (2.30)	-
Sex (Male)	54%	47%	-	54%	-
Education	14.34 (2.41)	13.25 (2.79)***	-	14.34 (2.40)	-
<b>Health</b>					
Poor/Fair	32%	32%	1.26 (0.93 – 1.71)	30%	1.47 (1.04 – 2.08)*
Good	31%	32%		32%	
Very Good/Excellent	47%	36%		38%	
Depression	36%	24%***	2.08 (1.45 – 2.98)*	24%**	1.85 (1.23 – 2.80)*
<b>Memory</b>					
Poor/Fair	12%	18%	1.25 (0.93 – 1.71)	14%	1.15 (0.81 – 1.63)
Good	31%	35%		34%	
Very Good/Excellent	57%	47%		53%	
Ever Smoke	57%	52%	1.56 (1.10 – 2.21)*	47%*	1.52 (1.04 – 2.24)*
Cut Down Drinking	39%	32%	1.46 (1.01 – 2.09)*	36%	1.08 (0.72 – 1.63)
Mild Activity	98%	95%	2.29 (0.72 – 7.33)	96%	1.81 (0.52 – 6.30)
Moderate Activity	82%	86%	0.61 (0.39 – 0.96)*	87%	0.68 (0.41 – 1.14)
Vigorous Activity	53%	53%	0.85 (0.60 – 1.20)	56%	0.90 (0.61 – 1.32)
Obese	37%	43%	0.77 (0.54 – 1.10)	43%	0.77 (0.52 – 1.15)

( $p < .001$ \*\*\*,  $p < .01$ \*\* ,  $p < .05$ \*)

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### Results

#### Unmatched Sample

- LGB participants were:
  - twice as likely to have ever had depression
  - 56% more likely to have ever smoked
  - 46% more likely to have ever felt like they needed to cut down on their drinking
  - 39% less likely to engage in moderate physical activity
- No differences in self-rated health or self-rated memory

#### Matched Sample

- LGB participants were:
  - 47% more likely to report having better health than heterosexual participants
  - 85% more likely to report ever having depression
  - 52% more likely to have ever smoked.
- No differences in self-rated memory

### Discussion

- LGB individuals appear to be at greater risk of ever experiencing depression than heterosexual individuals; however, they report better physical health. This may suggest a tendency for resilience.
- LGB individuals may engage in more health risk behaviors.
- Mental health and other medical professionals should receive special training to better understand the unique problems of LGB individuals.