

Substance use and mental health among sexual and gender diverse peoples from Pacific Island Countries and Territories.

Authors: **JOHN HOWARD**¹, **VALENTINO WICHMAN**²

¹ Conjoint Senior Lecturer, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales, Australia,

² Manager, Policy and Planning, Ministry of Health, Cook Islands

Presenter's email: Dr John Howard: jphoward.work@gmail.com

Valentino Wichman: valentino.wichman@gmail.com

Abstract:

Introduction: The aetiology of high prevalence of substance use and mental health concerns among sexual and gender diverse people is not fully understood. Complex factors are involved, including 'coming out', availability of social networks/support, availability of appropriate health and community services, social stigma and vilification, mental illness, abuse (emotional, physical or sexual), and minority stress. What is known about the associations between sexual and gender diversity and substance use and mental health concerns for peoples from the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)?

Method: This paper uses available data to illustrate what is known to date.

Findings: UNDP 2017 Multi-country mapping reveals that mean ages of sexual debut vary among MSM across the PICTs, as do number of partners, stigma, shame, family and community support, alcohol use and force sex. In the Cook Islands, young lesbian women and bisexual people present as invisible/transparent, men who desire other men and *akava'ine* (Trans women) slightly more visible. Self-harm, suicidality, substance use, violence, bullying prevalent. YDRS studies in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands demonstrate significantly higher alcohol and other drug use for all substance surveyed, IDU, depression and suicidality for gender diverse youth.

Implications for policy and practice: These findings renew calls for specific attention to the needs of sexual and gender diverse young people in the PICTs, via policy and youth friendly, and appropriate service provision.

Themes: LGBTIQ, Cross cultural and International

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