

# Patterns of marijuana use and sexual violence among sexual minority high school students: Perspectives from the California Healthy Kids Survey

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## Background

Sexual minority students are at increased risk for adverse outcomes associated with substance use and violence. There is a need to understand the distinct vulnerabilities of youth who have a non-heterosexual sexual orientation, and their marijuana use, particularly as more states legalize and normalize recreational use of marijuana. This study examines marijuana use and sexual victimization among high school students by sexual minority status.

## Methods

Data are from the 2018-2019 California Healthy Kids Survey (N=92,665).

### Measures:

- **Demographics:** grade, sex, race, ethnicity, and sexual minority identity
- **Sexual Violence:** 'Have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to?' (yes=1, no=0)
- **Marijuana use:** 'During your *life*, how many times have you used marijuana?', and 'During the *past 30-days*, on how many days did you use marijuana?'. Responses were dichotomized (yes=1, no=0).

## Analyses

We conducted *multi-level logistic regression analyses* to assess relationships between past 30-day and lifetime marijuana use, sexual minority identity, and sexual victimization, controlling for demographics and nesting of students within schools and counties. Analyses were conducted in Stata v. 15.1.

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## Results

**TABLE 1**  
Sample Demographics

	n (%)
9 <sup>th</sup> grade	50,973 (55.0)
11 <sup>th</sup> grade	41,692 (45.0)
Female	37,522 (49.7)
White	28,825 (34.2)
Hispanic/Latino	48,016 (52.1)
Heterosexual	71,844 (85.8)
Gay/Lesbian	1,666 (2.0)
Bisexual	5,408 (6.5)
Not sure yet	3,453 (4.1)
Something else	1,396 (1.7)

**TABLE 2. Results of multi-level logistic regression analyses to assess differences in marijuana use**

	Past 30-day		Lifetime use	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
11 <sup>th</sup> grade <sup>a</sup>	2.47***	(1.42, 4.32)	2.70***	(1.87, 3.89)
Female <sup>b</sup>	0.87	(0.72, 1.05)	0.92	(0.80, 1.05)
White <sup>c</sup>	1.22	(0.98, 1.53)	1.21	(0.90, 1.64)
Hispanic/Latino <sup>d</sup>	1.73***	(1.55, 1.93)	1.76***	(1.52, 2.04)
Gay/lesbian <sup>e</sup>	1.50**	(1.17, 1.94)	1.90***	(1.45, 2.50)
Bisexual <sup>e</sup>	1.18	(0.90, 1.55)	1.46*	(1.04, 2.04)
Not sure yet <sup>e</sup>	1.34***	(1.20, 1.49)	1.09	(0.96, 1.24)
Something else <sup>e</sup>	2.35***	(2.11, 2.61)	1.59***	(1.29, 1.95)
Sexual Violence	5.93***	(3.98, 8.83)	6.46***	(4.19, 9.98)

Note: Reference group: a: 9<sup>th</sup> grade, b: male, c: non-white, d: non-Hispanic/Latino, e: heterosexual youth  
\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001

## Conclusion

Overall, marijuana use tends to be higher among sexual minority students and students who experienced sexual violence. Our results show that students who are unsure or identified as 'something else' are at greater risk of marijuana use. Results support prior research on high school students who identify as sexual minority, including those who are unsure of their sexual identity, are at higher risk for marijuana use. Greater efforts are needed to examine the intersection of substance use and sexual victimization and the disproportionate burden facing adolescents across multiple categories of sexual orientation. The work is essential to support sexual minority students through effective prevention programs.

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