



Alcohol and suicide: insights from LGBTQ+ communities' experiences

Introduction

In early 2023, we carried out a series of interviews to explore alcohol and suicide with LGBTQ+ people. Through these interviews we heard powerful experiences that have started to help us understand the complex and interconnected factors involved and where changes are needed in healthcare services to better support LGBTQ+ communities and prevent suicide.

Although the connection between alcohol and suicide is well-established, there is limited exploration of how this intersects with the experience of LGBTQ+ communities, especially in their own words. This briefing provides a summary of our findings.

Finding 1:

on personal identity

Identity and circumstance is complex, nuanced and highly personal. This is reflected in people's lived experience of drinking alcohol and suicidality or self-harm and is a vital factor to be considered in effective support.

Gender and sexuality is only one part of someone's identity. We heard that motivations for and experiences of drinking alcohol for participants existed in part outside of the lens of LGBTQ+ identity.

“ On some occasions I had deliberately drunk alcohol because I knew it would lower my inhibitions. It would make me more likely to do something to harm myself. ”

Often, participants felt they weren't being seen in their totality during interactions with healthcare professionals. Participants stated that effective support should consider the complexities and nuance of people's identities and personal circumstances. Healthcare professionals should take the time to exercise non-judgemental curiosity.

“ With the multiple identities I couldn't speak to the doctor, it was this and that. I'd, you know, taken much time to fill out some forms. My answer couldn't fit into the box. ”

What is the Suicide Prevention Consortium?

The Suicide Prevention Consortium is made up of four organisations: Samaritans (lead), National Suicide Prevention Alliance, Support After Suicide Partnership and With You. As part of the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance, it aims to bring the expertise of its member organisations and the voice of those with lived experience directly to policymakers, to improve suicide prevention in England.





Finding 2:

on society's expectations

Cis-heteronormativity and LGBTQ+ phobia were pervasive and significant for some participants in their experiences of drinking alcohol, suicidality or self-harming, and seeking support.

Current public and policy discourse for some participants contributed to a sense of hopelessness or led to feelings of negativity and shame around their LGBTQ+ identity. At a community level formed a barrier to social connection and thus contributed to feelings of isolation and a negative sense of self.

“ I felt really isolated and marginalised and I'd been hating myself because of that, I've used alcohol to connect me with feelings of a better self. ”

Many participants suggested a need for healthcare professionals to better understand LGBTQ+ identities, and common contextual factors to suicidality and drinking alcohol.

“ It's one part of my life, it's not everything, but it's important for [healthcare professionals] to know that because that's a lens through which you can see some of my experiences ”

To find out more about this work and read the full report, you can visit [Samaritans' website](https://www.samaritans.org).

Finding 3:

on the role of community

Community and connection was important for many participants' sense of belonging and was one central mechanism influencing their experiences with drinking alcohol.

LGBTQ+ spaces were regarded as uniquely valuable to participants as a means to experience a sense of belonging and express their gender and sexuality in a safe and accepting place.

“ I think that's [LGBTQ+ drug and alcohol group therapy] probably the place where I've, over time, brought so many different things and taken in so many other different things from people. ”

Contact a Samaritan

If you need someone to talk to, we listen. We won't judge or tell you what to do. Call us any time, day or night, for free on 116 123 or visit [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org) for other ways to get in touch. Whatever you're facing, a Samaritan will face it with you.

Need to talk?

We are With You. Get free, confidential support with alcohol, drugs or mental health from one of our local services or online.