Annex 2: Nationally representative estimates of illicit drug use by self-reported sexual orientation, 2007/08 and 2008/09 BCS

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1   INTRODUCTION

The British Crime Survey (BCS) is a nationally representative survey that includes a self-completion module asked of 16 to 59 year olds. This enables more sensitive topics to be covered, such as questions relating to illicit drug use. Since the 2007/08 survey the self-completion module has included an additional question asking respondents about their sexual orientation.

The BCS provides general population estimates of illicit drug use prevalence in England and Wales. BCS drug use figures are commonly reported by both personal and household demographic characteristics[1] and now, for the first time, the BCS can be used to provide estimates of illicit drug use in the *last year* by self-reported sexual orientation.[2] Other surveys have tended to be restricted to the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender communities, rather than surveying these groups as part of a nationally representative sample of the general population.

2   FINDINGS

Within this analysis, 98 per cent of respondents reported that they were heterosexual or straight; one per cent gay or lesbian and one per cent bisexual (with an almost equal split by gender). Analysis presented here combines adults who identified as being gay or lesbian with those who were bisexual; two per cent of the population in total (data not shown).

Compared with heterosexual adults, gay or bisexual adults were more likely to have taken any drug (10.0% and 32.8% respectively) or any Class A drug (3.6% and 11.1% respectively) in the *last year* (Table A2.1).

This higher prevalence of *last year* drug use among gay or bisexual adults was found across most drug types: powder cocaine, ecstasy, hallucinogens, amphetamines, cannabis, tranquilisers, ketamine and amyl nitrite.

The higher level of illicit drug use among gay/bisexual adults may be due, at least in part, to the younger age profile of individuals identifying themselves as in this group. Around one-third of the heterosexual population included in this analysis (mean age 36.8) was aged between 16 and 29; the proportion of the gay or bisexual population (mean age 31.5) in this age band was around half (Table A2.2). As levels of illicit drug use are known to be higher among younger adults[3], the age profile may have an effect on drug use estimates for gay or bisexual adults. See Box A2.1 for further details.

Levels of *last year* drug use among gay/bisexual adults remain higher than heterosexual adults when making a comparison by gender; 38.2 per cent of gay/bisexual men and 26.9 per cent of gay/bisexual women were *last year* drug users compared with 13.3 per cent of heterosexual men and 6.8 per cent of heterosexual women (Table A2.1).

- Comparing gay/bisexual men with heterosexual men, use of any drug in the *last year* is around three times higher (38.2% and 13.3% respectively). This reflected higher levels of use of the majority of individual drugs asked about: powder cocaine, ecstasy,

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[1] See for example, Hoare, J. (2009) *Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2008/09 British Crime Survey*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 12/09. London: Home Office. http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1209.pdf

[2] The sexual orientation question on the BCS does not ask respondents if they identify as transgender.

[3] See Chapters 3 and 4 in Hoare, J. (2009) *Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2008/09 British Crime Survey*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 12/09. London: Home Office. http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1209.pdf.

hallucinogens, amphetamines, cannabis, tranquillisers, ketamine and amyl nitrite. The greatest difference was detected in the use of amyl nitrite[4] in the *last year* by gay/bisexual and heterosexual men (23.7% and 1.8% respectively).

- *Last year* use of any drug among gay/bisexual women was around four times higher than for heterosexual women (26.9% and 6.8% respectively). Among individual drugs, *last year* prevalence of powder cocaine, ecstasy, hallucinogens, amphetamines, cannabis and amyl nitrite was higher among gay/bisexual females than heterosexual females.

Box A2.1 Age standardised prevalence of drug use in the *last year* by sexual orientation

Age-standardisation adjusts rates to take into account the age profile of the population under study and is regularly used in the analysis of morbidity and mortality statistics. This is because the age structure of the population could directly affect statistics such as mortality rates; it may be that a high number of deaths in an area could be due, at least in part, to a large ageing population. In a similar way, drug use rates are known to be higher among younger adults, and also among men, hence high levels of drug use among gay or bisexual adults may be explained, at least in part, by the age and sex profile of the group.

The age-standardised rates are provided in Annex Table 2.1 as an indication of comparable levels across different groups. Due to the difference in age profile between the different sexual orientation groups, age-standardised estimates of drug use prevalence within sex were created.

Standardising the drug use rates in this way shows that most of the variations observed between groups remain after controlling for the differing age distributions, indicating that levels of drug use are relatively higher among gay or bisexual adults than heterosexual adults.

Differences in levels of drug use between heterosexual and gay/bisexual women are partly attributable to an even clearer difference in age profile between these groups in this analysis; 32 per cent of heterosexual females were aged between 16 and 29, whereas 62 per cent of gay/bisexual females were in the same age bracket (Table A2.2).[5]

Overall prevalence of drug use among men in the general population is around twice as high as for women; thus, heterosexual men had higher levels of *last year* drug use than heterosexual women for all drug types.[6] In contrast, there was more similarity in levels of drug use when comparing gay/bisexual men and women (Table A2.1).

- The statistically significant differences seen in *last year* use of illicit drugs were that gay or bisexual men had higher levels of *last year* use of magic mushrooms (men: 4.1 per cent, women: 0.8 per cent) and amyl nitrite[4] (men: 23.7%; women: 6.0%).

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[4] Amyl nitrite is well known as an aid to anal intercourse.
[5] The difference is slightly less marked for men: 34 per cent of heterosexual men are aged between 16 and 29 compared with 45 per cent of gay/bisexual men.
[6] No statistically significant differences were found for opiate use or glues, likely in part due to the low prevalence of these drugs within this population.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Around 500 out of the 25,000 self-completion respondents in each year identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Due to this relatively small number, data from the 2007/08 and 2008/09 BCS have been combined to provide more robust estimates of use of individual drug types[7] by sexual orientation and also gender. Figures and commentary are based on analysis of respondents' drug use in the *last year*.

The sexual orientation question is only asked if respondents complete the module on the laptop themselves, not if they agree to an interviewer completing the survey on their behalf (7,625 cases) or, of course, if they refuse to complete the module (3,633). And as with any self-completion survey, respondents can choose not to answer a particular question; in 423 cases respondents answered "don't know" and 1,167 "don't wish to answer". In total, around 985 adults aged 16 to 59 identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual out of the total 46,672 adults who provided self-report information about their sexual orientation.[8]

Again, not all respondents provide answers to all the drug use questions (although item non-response is low); hence the combined achieved sample of those who responded to the sexual orientation question and also provided sufficient information to calculate the prevalence of any illicit drug use in the *last year* was 46,052.

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[7] The BCS has asked about methamphetamine use since 2008/09; as this question was not asked in 2007/08 this combined dataset does not include methamphetamine as an individual drug type.
[8] The relatively small numbers of respondents identifying themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, alongside the numbers who were unable or refused to answer the question on sexual orientation, means that drug use estimates by sexual orientation should be treated with some caution.

Table A2.1 Proportion of <u>16 to 59 year olds</u> reporting use of drugs in the *last year*, by self-reported sexual orientation

Percentages	Heterosexual or straight			Gay or bisexual			Two-year combined dataset (2007/08 & 2008/09 BCS)
							All aged 16-59 reporting sexual orientation
	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	
Class A							
Any cocaine	2.9	4.1	1.7	8.1	8.4	7.7	**3.0**
Cocaine powder	2.9	4.1	1.7	7.9	8.2	7.6	**3.0**
Crack cocaine	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.7	1.1	0.2	**0.2**
Ecstasy	1.7	2.5	1.0	7.0	7.9	6.0	**1.9**
Hallucinogens	0.6	0.9	0.3	3.5	4.6	2.3	**0.7**
LSD	0.2	0.4	0.1	2.1	2.3	1.9	**0.3**
Magic mushrooms	0.5	0.7	0.3	2.5	4.1	0.8	**0.5**
Opiates	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.8	0.1	**0.1**
Heroin	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.5	0.8	0.1	**0.1**
Methadone	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.7	0.1	**0.1**
Class A/B							
Amphetamines	1.1	1.5	0.7	4.6	4.1	5.3	**1.2**
Class B							
Cannabis	8.1	11.0	5.2	21.3	19.7	23.0	**8.3**
Class B/C							
Tranquillisers	0.5	0.7	0.4	2.2	2.7	1.7	**0.6**
Class C							
Anabolic steroids	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.3	**0.1**
Ketamine	0.5	0.6	0.3	2.6	3.6	1.6	**0.5**
Not Classified							
Amyl nitrite	1.4	1.8	1.0	15.2	23.7	6.0	**1.7**
Glues	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.8	0.8	0.8	**0.1**
Any Class A drug[1]	**3.6**	**5.1**	**2.1**	**11.1**	**12.6**	**9.4**	3.7
Any stimulant drug[2]	**4.3**	**5.9**	**2.7**	**20.8**	**29.0**	**11.8**	4.7
Any drug[3]	**10.0**	**13.3**	**6.8**	**32.8**	**38.2**	**26.9**	10.5
Unweighted base[4]	*45,088*	*20,575*	*24,513*	*964*	*502*	*462*	*46,052*

1. 'Any Class A drug' comprises powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, LSD, magic mushrooms, heroin and methadone.

2. 'Any stimulant drug' comprises powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines and amyl nitrite.

3. 'Any drug' comprises powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, LSD, magic mushrooms, heroin, methadone, amphetamines, cannabis, tranquillisers, anabolic steroids, ketamine, amyl nitrite, glues, any other pills/powders/drugs smoked.

4. Base numbers relate to any drug use. Bases for other drug measures will be similar.

Table A2.2 Age breakdown of <u>16 to 59 year olds</u> by self-reported sexual orientation

Percentages						Two-year combined dataset (2007/08 & 2008/09 BCS)	
	Heterosexual or straight			Gay or bisexual			All aged 16-59 reporting sexual orientation
	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	
Age							
16-19	10	10	10	14	12	17	10
20-24	12	12	11	22	18	27	12
25-29	11	11	11	16	14	18	11
30-34	11	11	11	10	11	9	11
35-39	12	12	12	10	11	9	12
40-44	13	13	13	10	13	7	13
45-49	12	12	12	8	9	6	12
50-54	10	10	10	6	6	5	10
55-59	9	9	10	3	5	2	9
All 16-59	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Mean age	**36.8**	**36.6**	**37.0**	**31.5**	**33.3**	**29.6**	**37.2**
(sd)	(12.4)	(12.4)	(12.4)	(11.5)	(11.7)	(11.0)	(12.4)
Unweighted base	*45,655*	*20,871*	*24,784*	*984*	*511*	*473*	*46,639*

Annex Table 2.1 Age-standardised[1] proportion of 16 to 59 year olds reporting use of drugs in the *last year*, by self-reported sexual orientation

Percentages					Two-year combined dataset (2007/08 & 2008/09 BCS)			
	Heterosexual or straight			**Gay or bisexual**			**All aged 16-59 reporting sexual orientation**
	All	Male	Female		All	Male	Female	
Class A								
Any cocaine	2.9	4.2	1.7		6.3	7.4	5.1	**3.0**
Cocaine powder	2.9	4.1	1.7		6.1	7.2	4.9	**3.0**
Crack cocaine	0.1	0.2	0.1		0.7	1.0	0.3	**0.2**
Ecstasy	1.8	2.5	1.0		5.2	6.5	3.7	**1.8**
Hallucinogens	0.6	0.9	0.3		2.7	3.8	1.5	**0.7**
LSD	0.2	0.4	0.1		1.5	1.8	1.2	**0.3**
Magic mushrooms	0.5	0.7	0.3		2.0	3.4	0.4	**0.5**
Opiates	0.1	0.2	0.1		0.5	0.8	0.2	**0.1**
Heroin	0.1	0.1	0.0		0.5	0.7	0.2	**0.1**
Methadone	0.1	0.1	0.1		0.5	0.7	0.2	**0.1**
Class A/B								
Amphetamines	1.1	1.5	0.7		3.6	3.6	3.6	**1.2**
Class B								
Cannabis	8.1	11.0	5.2		17.9	18.2	17.5	**8.3**
Class B/C								
Tranquillisers	0.6	0.7	0.4		2.1	2.9	1.3	**0.6**
Class C								
Anabolic steroids	0.1	0.2	0.0		0.6	0.7	0.4	**0.1**
Ketamine	0.5	0.6	0.3		2.0	3.0	0.8	**0.5**
Not Classified								
Amyl nitrite	1.4	1.8	1.0		13.2	22.1	3.6	**1.6**
Glues	0.1	0.2	0.1		0.6	0.6	0.5	**0.1**
Any Class A drug[2]	**3.6**	**5.1**	**2.1**		**8.9**	**11.0**	**6.6**	3.7
Any stimulant drug[3]	**4.3**	**5.9**	**2.8**		**17.9**	**26.8**	**8.2**	4.6
Any drug[4]	**10.1**	**13.3**	**6.9**		**28.7**	**36.0**	**20.7**	10.5
Unweighted base[5]	*45,088*	*20,575*	*24,513*		*964*	*502*	*462*	*46,052*

1. The combined BCS dataset was age-standardised using five-year age groups within sex (with the exception of 50-59 due to low numbers in these cells) for each of the sexual orientation groups, so that the proportion within each age and sex group was equivalent to the profile of the 16 to 59 year old population. See Box A2.1 for an explanation of the effect of the standardised drug use rates.
2. 'Any Class A drug' comprises powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, LSD, magic mushrooms, heroin and methadone.
3. 'Any stimulant drug' comprises powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines and amyl nitrite.
4. 'Any drug' comprises powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, LSD, magic mushrooms, heroin, methadone, amphetamines, cannabis, tranquillisers, anabolic steroids, ketamine, amyl nitrite, glues, any other pills/powders/drugs smoked.
5. Base numbers relate to any drug use. Bases for other drug measures will be similar.