# Substance abuse in queer communities tied to childhood trauma



Nearly every individual within the queer community recalls a traumatic event from their formative years, from societal prejudices and direct aggression. These adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) significantly heighten the likelihood of chronic medical and mental health conditions in adulthood.

A prominent voice on the matter, Benuska, articulates that the recourse to substances is not unusual among people grappling with hardship, but that the queer community faces compounded challenges. "Possible trauma, lack of supports, mental health issues, and a valid distrust of the healthcare system compound the struggle," Benuska clarifies.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that queer individuals are more likely to use and misuse nicotine, alcohol, and other drugs compared to their heterosexual and/or cisgender peers. The disparity stems from several overlapping factors.

"A combination of mental health issues—depression, anxiety, PTSD—together with a lack of secure support systems, underemployment, housing instability and negative experiences within healthcare makes the queer community particularly vulnerable to substance use as a coping mechanism," Benuska explains. Historical negative experiences within healthcare systems further complicate the situation, potentially leading individuals to lean more on substances rather than seeking professional help.

While some turn to substances periodically for stress relief, Benuska asserts the importance of cultivating a diverse toolkit of coping mechanisms. He warns that relying exclusively on substances can be insufficient and counterproductive in managing life's tribulations. "Paying attention to yourself by prioritising a range of self-care needs and tools is crucial," he recommends, outlining tools such as fostering social connections, reframing negative self-talk, and discovering new sources of joy.

"Being human is an ongoing process of adaptation," Benuska reflects, highlighting the need for individuals to adapt their strategies amidst changing life circumstances. He cautions that unchecked substance use can inhibit one's ability to care for themselves and, when it escalates to abuse, it becomes critical to seek intervention.

Identifying when substance use turns into abuse is vital, and Benuska suggests four key indications that professional help might be necessary:

* Ineffectiveness: If substance use causes relationship issues or consistent poor wellbeing.
* Difficulty in Cessation: Experiencing side effects or negative consequences during periods of non-use.
* Stagnation: Inability to accomplish tasks, enjoy life, or pursue goals.
* Hindered Well-being: When substance use obstructs personal definitions of health and wellbeing.

Ineffectiveness: If substance use causes relationship issues or consistent poor wellbeing.

Difficulty in Cessation: Experiencing side effects or negative consequences during periods of non-use.

Stagnation: Inability to accomplish tasks, enjoy life, or pursue goals.

Hindered Well-being: When substance use obstructs personal definitions of health and wellbeing.

Benuska recommends seeking a mental health professional to identify productive coping strategies when these indicators present themselves.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)