Reviewer's report

Title: Alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use amongst same-sex attracted women: results from the Western Australian Lesbian and Bisexual Women’s Health and Well-Being Survey

Version: 2 Date: 24 March 2009

Reviewer: Karin Bergmark

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting descriptive study of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use in lesbian and bisexual women in Western Australia. The results highlight the need to acknowledge these problems in LBW and find strategies to inform and support the women. The data from the general population is from different data sets, and there are selection problems in the study population, which makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the magnitude of the problem. This is however recognized and partly discussed by the authors, and does not lessen the importance of the findings.

Page 4: There is little information about the data from the general population. Is the norm population representative? Comparable to the study population? When was that data set collected (reported in 2005 according to reference 20)? Age distribution? Socio-demographic distribution?

Page 5-6: The method and validation of the method is well described and seems adequate. As the authors point out, there may be some problems with selection in the study population, but the authors have made a thorough effort to minimize this selection bias. A weakness may be that one way of recruiting women outside events was by websites. Presumably mostly younger women use the Internet, thus distorting the age distribution to get a representative sample. This may lessen the generalizability of the results.

Page 6: The authors bring up what the call “a key strength of the present study” in the description of method. This should be transferred to the Discussion section.

Page 6: In Measures, an alcohol consumption of more than four standard drinks each time they drank was considered as harmful drinking. Before that, also other forms of alcohol consumption is described as excessive (reference 23). What made the authors choose the definition of more than four standard drinks only? Isn’t daily drinking as least as harmful?

Page 8: The women in the study population were 15-67 years old, median age 34 years, compared to median age 37 years in Western Australian (reference 26). The authors draw the conclusion that older LBW were marginally underrepresented in the study. Is this really so? What range is it in the general population – also children? In that case the median age of 37 years means that
many are much older than 67 years, and the study population is not only marginally underrepresented, but strongly underrepresented. But more importantly, what was the median age and range in the norm population?

Page 8: The distribution of university or advanced education between the study population and the women in reference 27 is highly skewed. This may lessen the generalizability of the results, but again, more importantly: How was the distribution of the norm data? It is especially remarkable that these highly educated women had this high consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs. In most other populations, high education is considered as “protective” against harmful lifestyle. Comments to that?

Page 9, Illicit drug use: There are no measures of drug use in the general population for the same year, but in 2004 17.3% of male (sic!) and female individuals reported use of an illicit drug. Is this really comparable to the study population? In most populations, men use more drugs than women. That would mean that the use of illicit drugs in LBW in the study is extremely high. And as the authors point out; higher than in both men and women in the general population. This could be discussed more thoroughly.

Page 10: The sexuality-related violence or harassment – is that within or outside a relationship? Is violence and harassment separated? I would think that there may be a difference between those entities, especially if it is violence within a relationship, and harassment outside a relationship. Is it possible to look into that?

Pages 12-13: As the authors point out, there seems to be a correlation between visiting the GLB scene and high use of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs. And that women not visiting the GLB scene may be underrepresented in the study population. With that, we do not have the full picture of the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs in the LBW group. This needs to be taken into account when discussing strategies to inform LBW. Maybe it is most imperative to capture the women visiting the GLB scene, but there may be a high use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs also in the groups not covered in the present study.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.