

Illinois cohort of rural sexual and gender minority individuals (Illinois Cohort)

Principal Investigator: Wiley D. Jenkins, PhD, MPH
Co-Investigators: Minjee Lee, PhD, Georgia Luckey, PhD
Performance Site: Illinois' central and southern 66 counties

BACKGROUND

Dr. Jenkins' research in southern IL has brought to light the barriers to health and health seeking behavior among a stigmatized group (people who use drugs). Building upon his earlier work with sexually transmitted infections, this led to an exploration of what is known about health, risks, and barriers among rural sexual and gender minority individuals (SGM). A PubMed search reveals exceedingly few articles explicitly addressing almost any health condition (e.g. STI risk, cancer screening) among rural SGM. With his current clinical trial and partnerships formed the past few years, Dr. Jenkins is in a position to begin gathering this data, which may be unique the US, about health and risky behaviors among rural SGM.

Dr. Jenkins received a BCBS-IL grant in 2021 to perform a survey of rural SGM individuals, and ultimately 398 were successfully recruited and provided data. In addition to behaviors and risks, much was learned about healthcare access, use, and stigmatizing experiences. With new funding from BCBS-IL for calendar year 2022, we would like to expand this work across a larger geographical area and engage participants longitudinally (i.e., for multiple surveys and an interview) versus a single time point.

STUDY RATIONALE

This study is intended to assess risks to good health and barriers to healthcare that people living in central and southern IL may face – especially as it may relate to their sexual orientation and gender identity. This study will help us better understand the nature of these risks and barriers, and perhaps how they may be addressed. Data will be collected through surveys and interviews.

Surveys will be comprised of individual modules. Each survey will include 'skip patterns' so that some questions are/are not shown to an individual based upon prior question responses. The great majority of questions are drawn from existing instruments, including: the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS); the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS); the Tobacco, Alcohol, Prescription medications, and other Substance (TAPS) Tool; the Patient Satisfaction Questionnaire short form (PSQ-18); the Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) instrument; and instruments assessing stigma and victimization.¹⁻⁷ There are a total of 8 modules, which will be divided across 3 surveys. Survey and modules will examine the following topics:

- ▶ SURVEY #1 - LIFE/DEMOGRAPHICS; COVID and HEALTHCARE
- ▶ SURVEY #2 - CHRONIC DISEASE and INFECTIOUS DISEASE
- ▶ SURVEY #3 - DRUG, ALCOHOL, AND TOBACCO USE; MENTAL HEALTH AND STIGMA; and SOCIAL SUPPORTS AND ENGAGEMENT

Interviews will be designed to gather further contextual information about: health and healthcare experiences; discuss survey results and health risks and intervention strategies that may be specific to the individual's characteristics; and explore opinions and satisfaction regarding study social media engagement.