**Title**: Intolerance of Uncertainty and Risky Behaviors among Neurodivergent College Students

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**Introduction:** Research on risky behaviors—such as marijuana use, alcohol consumption, and risky sexual behaviors—among neurodivergent college students reveals significant trends with implications for health interventions. Neurodivergent students, including those with ADHD, are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors compared to their neurotypical peers (Rooney et al., 2012; Montgomery, 2023)—for example, college students with ADHD report higher rates of problematic alcohol use and substance abuse. The prevalence of risky sexual behaviors is also notably high among college students, with neurodivergent individuals engaging in such behaviors at increased rates. Unique challenges, such as stigma and mental health issues, may exacerbate these risks and lead neurodivergent students to adopt maladaptive coping strategies, including substance use (Syharat et al., 2023; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2020). Intolerance of uncertainty (IU) is an emerging psychological factor mediating these risky behaviors. Studies indicate that individuals with higher IU levels are more prone to impulsive behaviors to manage emotional distress (Sadeh & Bredemeier, 2021). This study hypothesizes that IU will mediate the association between neurodivergent identity and risky behaviors in college students.

**Method:** A sample of 621 college students (*M*age = 19.48, SD = 1.47) primarily identifying as female (74.7%) from a large university (n = 371) and an undergraduate-only college (n = 253) completed an online survey via Qualtrics. The survey included demographic questions and standardized scales, including the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (Carleton et al., 2007), the Daily Drinking Questionnaire (Collins et al., 1995), the Sexual Risk Behavior Scale (Fino et al., 2021), and the Daily Marijuana/Cannabis Questionnaire. Students were also asked if they had ever been diagnosed with or self-identified as neurodivergent (e.g., autism, ADHD, OCD, Tourette’s Syndrome).

**Results:** Of the participants, 131 (21%) reported a neurodivergent diagnosis, with an additional 17 (2.7%) self-identifying as neurodivergent. ADHD was the most common identity (68.2%), followed by autism (9.5%), dyslexia (7.4%), and OCD (16.2%), with some overlap across categories. Point-biserial correlations, controlling for site and gender, revealed significant positive correlations between neurodivergent identity and weekly marijuana use (*r* = .16, *p* =.007), risky sexual behaviors (*r* = .12, *p* =.04), and intolerance of uncertainty (*r* = .239, *p* < .001). No significant correlation emerged between neurodivergent identity and weekly alcohol use (*r* = .068, *p* =.248). The hypothesis that neurodivergent identity would be linked to risky behaviors through reduced IU tolerance was partially supported, showing a significant indirect effect on weekly alcohol use (B = -.074, 95% CI = -.140, -.023) but not on marijuana use or risky sexual behaviors.

**Discussion:** This study highlights that neurodivergent college students are more likely to engage in certain risky behaviors, such as marijuana use and risky sexual activities, and experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. While intolerance of uncertainty (IU) mediated the link between neurodivergent identity and alcohol use, it did not have the same effect on marijuana use or sexual behaviors, suggesting different underlying factors may drive these behaviors. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions that address IU and the unique challenges neurodivergent students face, potentially reducing reliance on maladaptive coping strategies in this population.

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