




## Understanding drug use and chemsex among men who have sex with men

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## Drug trends among gay men

**Historically**

- Popular drugs: ecstasy, cocaine, ketamine

**Currently**

- Popular drugs: mephedrone, GHB/GBL, crystal meth (?)

Name of drug	Street names	Delivery
Mephedrone	Meow Meow, MCAAT, plant food	Snorted as a powder, injected or administered rectally
GHB/GBL	G, Gina, liquid ecstasy	Swallowed in small liquid doses
Crystal meth	Crystal, Ice, Tina, T	Snorted as powder, smoked in glass pipe, or administered rectally

## The concept of “chemsex”

- All have stimulant properties, but also:
  - **Enhance sexual arousal**
- Increasing evidence mephedrone, GHB/GBL and crystal meth used for specific and intentional sexual purpose
- Chemsex: “Sex between men that occurs under the influence of drugs taken immediately preceding and/or during the sexual session”

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THURSDAY 26 JANUARY 2014

Is crystal meth behind London's rising HIV levels?

Crystal meth use in the London, where it is inci

Comment: Is London's gay scene self-harming through sex and drug use?

105 reader comments

David Stuart from Antidote comments for PinkNews on a recent report concerning the increased use of crystal meth throughout London's gay scene.

The data published recently from London Friend's Antidote drug and alcohol service about gay men, sex, drugs, and the sexual health consequences has caused some stir amongst health services as well as in the press, with responses ranging from alarm and concern to criticism of alarmist, biased monitoring of data. There's one thing that

Meth: causing a 'health nightmare' in London?

THE METH-FUELLED, WEEK-LONG ORGIES RAVAGIN LONDON'S GAY SEX PARTY SCENE

By Neil Gray | Jan 2 2013

In 2012, Gay Star News reported at least three separate deaths in the months of July, August and October where gay men died of suspected drug overdose in clubs and sex saunas.

Drugs, clubs and death: what can South London's gay community do?

A group of community leaders meet in South London's clubbing district Vauxhall to discuss the drug GHB, and its relationship to clubbing and the gay community

10 MAY 2013 BY JEAN PAUL ZAPATA

10 points on reddit

David Stuart is from Antidote

## Use of chemsex drugs



### Clinic and service user data

- ASTRA Study (2011-2012)
  - Clinic study of HIV positive men in two cities
  - Crystal meth and GHB/GBL used by 9% in previous 3 months
  - Mephedrone used by 7% in previous 3 months
- *Shigella flexneri* 3a study
  - Two thirds of men diagnosed had used chemsex drugs
  - Drug use typically facilitated by apps and occurred at private sex parties
- CODE clinic (within previous 6 months)
  - 19% had used GHB/GBL
  - 10% had used crystal meth
  - 21% had used mephedrone
- Antidote service
  - 3% of presentations with chemsex drugs in 2005
  - 85% of presentations with chemsex drugs in 2012

## Use of chemsex drugs



### Community survey data

- EMIS survey of 2010
  - 38 countries across Europe
  - 176,000 responses from MSM
  - 19,000 responses in England
- EMIS data for England (within previous 4 weeks)
  - Crystal meth 0.7% (London 2.9%)
  - Mephedrone 2.9% (London 10.2%)
  - GHB/GBL 1.6% (London 5.5%)
  - Highest among men with HIV

	Proportion of men who used drugs in the last 4 weeks		
	LSL	Elsewhere in London	Elsewhere in England
Alcohol	93.2	90.6	87.6
Tobacco	43.5	40.0	38.7
Poppers	38.2	33.3	26.9
Sedatives	8.2	6.2	3.8
Cannabis	19.5	15.9	10.5
Ecstasy	11.7	7.1	4.1
Speed	1.3	1.4	1.7
Crystal meth	4.9	2.9	0.7
Heroin	0.1	0.2	0.3
Mephedrone	10.2	5.2	2.9
GHB/GBL	10.5	5.5	1.6
Ketamine	9.6	5.9	3.8
LSD	0.6	0.4	0.3

## South London Chemsex study



- Aims:
  1. To explore social context of chemsex
  2. motivations for drug use during sex
  3. experience of harm and harm reduction service development need
- 30 in-depth interview with gay men in key South London boroughs
- 4 Focus groups with gay men, clinical and community service providers



- Sample characteristics:
  - 13 HIV positive V.s 17 last test negative
  - Mean age 36
  - 1/3 sample were migrant gay men

## Personal and social context



- ↑ cost, ↓ quality of ecstasy and cocaine
- Mephedrone and GHB/GBL cheap and widely accessible
  - Injection of mephedrone and/or crystal meth reported by one third
- Access and uptake for sex facilitated by GPS sexual networking apps
- Wide spread access and use in gay male sex-on-premises venues



## Meanings and motivations



- Facilitating sexual confidence
- *I have never really been able to have sober gay sex and then I think eventually what happened was crystal meth, and getting so out of control. There was then all the guilt about what I was doing on the drugs. I could not escape from this cycle of guilt around sex and the drugs. And it just goes backwards and forwards. [Aged 24, last tested HIV negative]*

## Meanings and motivations



- Facilitating sexual confidence
- Increased sexual desire and libido
- Enabling sexual longevity and partner turnover
- Facilitating sexual 'adventure'

## Drugs and sexual risk taking



- Particularly complex relationship but falls into 3 main groups

### 1. Strict maintenance of safer sex behaviour

- Nearly a quarter of men had strict rules about condom use
- Took drugs but little evidence of risky sex

## Drugs and sexual risk taking



### 2. Pre-determined unprotected anal intercourse

- A quarter of men had decided to (nearly) always have sex without condoms
- All were HIV positive
- All had condomless sex with men they believed to also be positive
- Drug use played minor role in action of STI risk, but did play major role in facilitating sex with more men and for longer

## Drugs and sexual risk taking



### 3. Unintended sexual risk under the influence of drugs

- A third of men had engaged in unintentional sexual risk behaviour
- Drugs had myopic effect
- Drugs could be cognitively incapacitating
- *I try to have protected sex but the thing is that when you're in a euphoric state, things happen. You might not be totally aware of what actually people are doing [to you] because you are that fucked. [Aged 50, last tested HIV negative]*

## Sexual health of participants



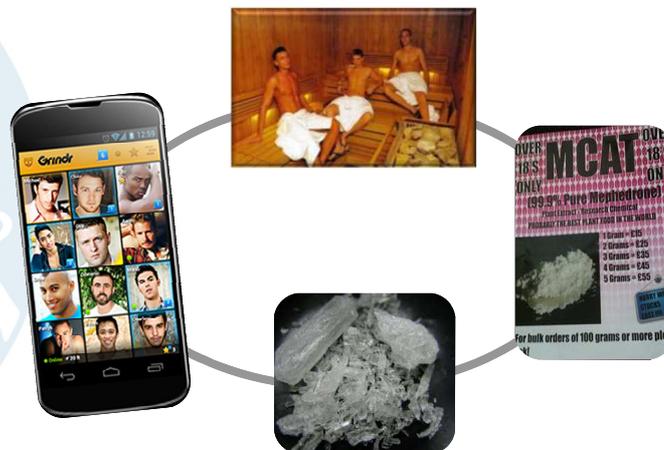
- Two HIV positive men attributed their status to chemsex
- More than a third had STI diagnosis in previous year
- Widespread reporting of penile abrasions and rectal fissures
- Mixed feelings about extent of sexual satisfaction or happiness
- *"It [chemsex] can get a bit lonely after a while when it's just fuck and go, fuck and go, fuck and go. It's not as if anyone stays the night anymore. That's just the lay of the land these days." [Aged 41, diagnosed HIV positive]*

## Negative experience & harm



- Overdosing (esp. GHB/GBL related)
- Significant concerns relating to sexual consent
- Acute harms to mental health
- Majority had not accessed professional support
- Many men wary of generic drug services

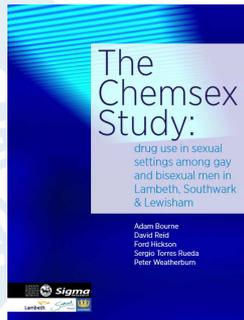
## Why is this arising as an issue now?



## Acknowledgements



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## Chemsex study outputs



### Journal articles

Bourne et al. "Chemsex" and harm reduction need among gay men in South London (in press). *International Journal of Drug Policy*.

Bourne et al. Illicit drug use in sexual settings ("Chemsex") and HIV/STI transmission risk behaviour among gay men in South London: findings from a qualitative study (Submission under review)

### Community report

South London Chemsex study: [www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/chemsex](http://www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/chemsex)

### Podcasts

[http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2014/chem\\_sex\\_study.html](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2014/chem_sex_study.html)

<http://www.sexualhealthnetwork.org.uk/episode-9-adam-bourne/>

## Other chemsex research



- Bonell C, Hickson F, Weatherburn P et al. Methamphetamine use among gay men across the UK. 2. Bourne A. *Drug use among men who have sex with men: Implications for harm reduction*. In: Stoicescu C, ed. *Global State of Harm Reduction 2012*. London: Harm Reduction International, 2012:147-55.
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- Daskalopoulou M, Rodger A, Phillips AN, et al. Recreational drug use, polydrug use, and sexual behaviour in HIV-positive men who have sex with men in the UK: results from the cross-sectional ASTRA Study. *Lancet HIV* 2014; 2014, doi:10.1016/S2352-3018(14)70001-3.
- Gilbert V, Simms I, Jenkins C, et al. Sex, drugs and smart phone applications: findings from semi-structured interviews with men who have sex with men diagnosed with *Shigella flexneri* 3a in England and Wales. *Sex Transm Infect* doi:10.1136/sextrans-2015-052014
- Stuart D. Sexualised drug use by MSM: background, current status and response. *J Assoc Nurses AIDS Care* 2013;13(1):6-10.

## Recommendations



- Closer integration of sexual health and harm reduction services
- Provision of harm reduction information to MSM
- Harm reduction training of chemsex party organisers
- Safe needle exchange facilities in sex-on-premises venues
- Psycho-therapeutic support for those wishing to manage use
- Strategic engagement with sexual networking apps to facilitate health promotion
- Continue work to tackle HIV related stigma