"Chemsex" and High-Risk Sexual Behaviours in HIV-Positive Men Who Have Sex With Men

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BACKGROUND

- In the UK, HIV incidence remains high among men who have sex with men (MSM).
- "Chemsex" refers to the use of drugs to increase sexual disinhibition and arousal. If drugs are injected it is referred to as "slamsex".
- Chemsex and slamsex may contribute to the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Typical drugs used for both chemsex and slamsex include MCAT, GHB/GBL, crystal meth, and ketamine.
- Despite the recent rise in chemsex among MSM, little is known about the population engaging in it, particularly among HIV+ MSM.

OBJECTIVES

We use self-reported behavioural data from HIV positive MSM linked to their clinical viral load (VL) records to:

1. Describe HIV positive MSM who engage in chemsex/slamsex.
2. Determine associations between chemsex/slamsex and sexual risk behaviours, a recent STI diagnosis, and having ever been diagnosed with hepatitis C.

METHODS

- Positive Voices is a cross-sectional, computer-assisted self-interview (CASl) behavioural and health needs survey. People living with HIV were recruited through a representative sample of 30 HIV clinics in England and Wales between May - November 2014.
- Participants (N=777; MSM n=532) self-reported sexual behaviours, injecting and injecting drug use during sex, and STI diagnoses over the previous year.
- Nationally weighted population prevalence estimates (with 95% CIs) of chemsex and slamsex among sexually active MSM (n=392) were calculated.
- Demographics were compared using the chi-square statistic. Multivariable regressions, based on a directed acyclic graph (Figure 1), were used to examine associations.

RESULTS

- Who is engaging in chemsex?
  - 105 (29%) of 392 sexually active MSM engaged in chemsex in the previous year, and 35 (10%) in slamsex (Figure 2).
  - Compared to other sexually active MSM, MSM who engaged in chemsex were more likely:
    - Be mostly aged 35-44 (33%) and 44-55 (35%), as opposed to 18-34 (20.1%) and >55 (18.9%) (p<0.01)
    - Live in London (37% vs 17%, p=0.03)
    - Have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety (38% vs. 24%, p=0.01)
    - Be current smokers (39% vs 24%, p=0.001)
    - Use drugs outside of sex (44% vs. 13%, p=0.001)
  - Similarly, those participating in slamsex were more likely:
    - Live in London (13% vs. 6%, p=0.046)
    - Be on ART (19% vs. 9%, p=0.049)
  - There were no associations with region of birth, education level, employment, having a main partner, binge drinking, or VL.

- Is there an association between chemsex and sexual risk behaviours?
  - 50% of men reported a bacterial STI diagnosis in the previous year, and 9.4% had ever been diagnosed with hepatitis C.
  - Chemsex was associated with an increased risk of being diagnosed with:
    - any STI (AOR: 3.42, 95% CI: 1.71-6.83)
    - gonorrhoea (AOR: 2.76, 95% CI: 1.31-5.82)
    - hepatitis C (AOR: 6.26, 95% CI: 2.05-19.1)
  - Slamsex was associated with increased odds of being diagnosed with:
    - any STI (AOR: 3.85, 95% CI: 1.28-11.8)
    - multiple STIs (AOR: 1.82, 95% CI: 1.18-2.79)
    - chlamydia (AOR: 3.09, 95% CI: 1.11-8.62)
    - hepatitis C (AOR: 9.12, 95% CI: 2.40-34.6)

- Is there an association between chemsex and STI diagnoses?
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CONCLUSIONS

- These are the first nationally representative estimates of chemsex and slamsex among HIV+ MSM in the UK.
- We show a clear association between chemsex and risky sexual practices.
- Beyond the potential for HIV transmission, chemsex is linked to STI diagnosis including hepatitis C infection.
- Interventions to address the risk of HIV and STI transmission among MSM who use drugs in a sexual context are needed.
- The first full round of Positive Voices is planned for spring 2016 and will allow for repeat analyses with a larger sample.

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‡Positive Voices Study Group

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- REFERENCES