Understanding the pleasure and benefits of drug use for LGBT+ communities

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Pharmacosex
Pleasure & pain
Chemsex
Women
Transgender
Perception of why LGBTQ+ use substances

- Health professionals & researchers pre-occupied with problems
- LGBTQ+ motivated by pleasure
Drivers of substance use for LGBTQ+

- Stigma
- Discrimination
- Harassment
- Violence
- Mood
- Anxiety
Sex & LGBTQ+

- Narrative dominated by chemsex
- Higher rates of substance use than non-LGBTQ+ individuals
  - i.e cannabis use 37.6% versus 16.2%
- Associations between polydrug use and various forms of sexual activity; namely, anal sex, public sex, sex with a friend, and sex with a stranger.
Why do LGBTQ+ use substances?

• Mitigate discrimination
• Improve mood and confidence
• Overcome inhibitions or counter difficulties that could reduce sexual pleasure
• Drive, desire & function benefits
• But also ‘therapeutic effects’
• To have fun!
• Enhances solitary & partner sex
• Facilitates risk taking and disinhibition
• Broadly normalization of drugs accompanied with liberalization of sexual practice
Which drugs?

- GHB
- Mephedrone
- Methamphetamine
- Cocaine
- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- MDMA/ecstasy
What do we know?

- Significant focus on sex work rather than sexual activity
- Young females catching up with young males in USA & Europe
- Higher rates of cannabis use in female same sex relationships
- Bi-sexual & more sexual partners associated with higher drug use
- Men who have sex with men & trans women – higher risk of problematic use
- HIV prevalence higher for Trans women
- Community support has a positive impact on levels of drug use (i.e. pride, social meet ups, advocacy organisations etc)
Wish list

• Disaggregate data
• SAGER equivalent
• Greater attention on women & trans
• Sensitive research questioning about orientation & identity
• Internationally agreed definition of ‘chemsex’
• Policy attention (current void)
• Proactive public health initiatives
• Harm reduction approach to sexualized drug use
• More research!
Useful resources

• Kinder, stronger, better [website]
• Sexualised drug use among LGBT people: a mixed methods [study] of reasons for engagement and associations with physical and psychological wellbeing
• A narrative systematic [review] of sexualised drug use and sexual health outcomes among LGBT people
• Associations [Between] Community-Level LGBTQ-Supportive Factors and Substance Use Among Sexual Minority Adolescents
• Decrease in [prevalence] but increase in frequency of non-marijuana drug use following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in a large cohort of young men who have sex with men and young transgender women
• [Sexualities] and Intoxication: “To Be Intoxicated Is to Still Be Me, Just a Little Blurry”—Drugs, Enhancement and Transformation in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Cultures
• [Pharmacosex]: Reimagining sex, drugs and enhancement
• The Normalization of Leisure Sex and Recreational Drugs: [Exploring] Associations Between Polydrug Use and Sexual Practices by English Festival-Goers