

# What Are We Really Asking; Chemsex or Sexualised Drug Use? Implications For Clinical Services

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## Background:

Sexualised drug use (SDU) is associated with higher rates of STIs. It is an important target for assessment and risk reduction. Research has focused on a subtype of SDU, Chemsex, common amongst men who have sex with men (MSM). A new question was introduced to the computer assisted self-interview (CASI) used by Sydney Sexual Health Centre (SSHC) in June 2018 - "Have you used drugs during sex in the last 6 months? (e.g. Ice/Crystal Meth, G)". It was based on a Chemsex question used at the time by Dean St (London).

## Methods:

One year of data was collected (01/12/2018 – 30/11/2019) on the response to this question by MSM at their initial visit, along with information from a free text field provided for clinicians to record the type of drug used. Frequencies were calculated.

## Results:

2246 MSM attended the clinic for the first time during the study period. Of those who responded in the affirmative (10%, n=223), 33% (n=74) had a clear notation from the clinician of the type of drug used. The most frequently used drug was crystal methamphetamine (46%, n=34), followed by Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (27%, n=20). Cocaine, amyl-nitrate, and 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) were the next most frequently used (15%, n=11, 14%, n=10 and 11%, n=8 respectively). Overall, 30% (n=22) of men responding in the affirmative to the question did not use a drug associated with Chemsex.

## Conclusion:

Within our centre, clinicians refer to this as the "Chemsex question". The evidence indicates, however, that patients responding to this question engage in a range of SDU. Previous research has shown limited evidence for differences in STI risk for those engaging in SDU versus Chemsex specifically. Within a clinical setting questions such as these may be used to assess broader SDU, as well as Chemsex. If Chemsex is being assessed, more targeted questions should be asked.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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