

Initiation of illicit drug use in the FLUX cohort of Australian gay and bisexual men

Garrett Prestage¹, Mohamed A. Hammoud¹, Lisa Maher¹, Louisa Degenhardt², Adam Bourne³, Toby Lea⁴, Brent Mackie⁵, Nicky Bath⁵, Bridget Haire¹, Colin Batrouney⁶, Fengyi Jin¹

¹ The Kirby Institute, UNSW, Sydney, ² The national Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney, ³ The Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, ⁴ The Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW, Sydney, ⁵ AIDS Council New South Wales, Sydney, ⁶ Victorian AIDS Council, Melbourne

Background

Drug use is more prevalent among gay and bisexual men (GBM) than in the general population, but few studies have reported incidence rates in this population. In an online cohort of GBM, we report the incidence of initiation of: amyl nitrite, cannabis, ecstasy, methamphetamine, cocaine, ketamine, and gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB).

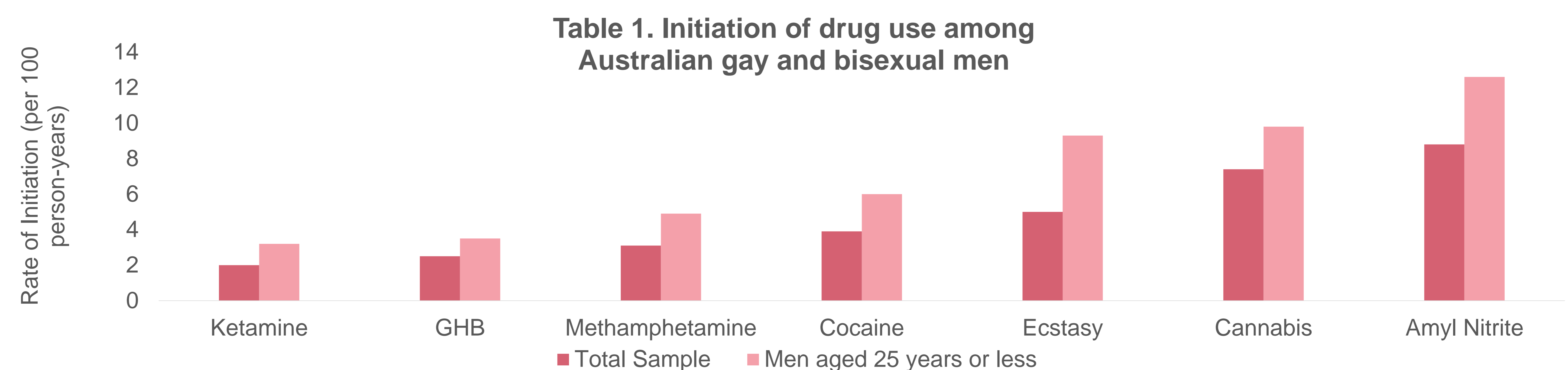
Methods

Between 2014-2017, 1710 men enrolled in the Flux cohort study of drug use among GBM; by Dec 2017, 1273 men reported their drug use during at least one follow-up survey round. Incidence of initiation was calculated in those with no history of use at baseline who reported recent (previous 6-month) use during follow-up, and “no-use” in those who reported recent use at baseline and no use during any of the follow-up intervals.

Results

Median age was 31 years (range:16.5-81) and 34.1% reported that half or more of their gay friends used drugs.

Men who initiated use of one drug type were more likely to initiate other drugs, and this was especially pronounced for methamphetamine. Among men who initiated methamphetamine use, many also initiated: cocaine (36.6%); GHB (20.8%); ketamine (25.5%); amyl (26.3%).



Conclusion

Rates of initiation of illicit drugs are high among GBM in Australia, particularly among younger men. Men who initiate methamphetamine use are very likely to also initiate other drugs. Harm reduction interventions need to target young GBM as a priority, and to consider polydrug use and minimising potential harm from drug interactions.

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