

Sex on crystal: the diversity of settings and practices related to Australian gay and bisexual men's crystal methamphetamine use

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Researchers and practitioners should remain open to the specificity and contingency of practices in different networks, and their entangled practices of use, when recommending institutional responses to gay and bisexual men's engagement in chemsex.

BACKGROUND

The Crystal, Pleasures and Sex between Men research project explored crystal methamphetamine use among gay and bisexual men (GBM) in Australia.

Project findings offer insights into the diversity of settings and practices associated with the use of chemicals in sexual settings.

The term 'chemsex' increasingly functions as a kind of shorthand in public health that consolidates GBM drug-enhanced sexual activity into an identifiable syndrome of behaviours and circumstances. In effect, the term now aligns recognisable combinations of sexual and drug-using practices with assumed correlates of risk.

METHOD

Between September 2017 and July 2018, individual semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with 88 GBM in Adelaide (n=16), Melbourne (n=28), Perth (n=16) and Sydney (n=28).

RESULTS

Our findings suggest that the concept of 'chemsex', as used within the current literature, falls short of capturing the full range of practices among GBM who use crystal methamphetamine in Australia, since:

- Crystal is used within a diversity of relationships outside of app-facilitated casual sex.
- Crystal is used in settings in which sex does not immediately, necessarily or intentionally take place.
- Sexual and drug-taking practices extend beyond those considered to be at risk of acquiring sexually transmissible infections or blood-borne viruses.

Rather than conceiving of 'chemsex' as a single phenomenon occurring in the same way in all situations, it is important to reconsider the use of the term to better understand the diversity of GBM's drug use.



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