

GAMMA-HYDROXYBUTYRATE (GHB) USE IN CHEMSEX AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH HIV RISK BEHAVIOURS AND OVERDOSE

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Background:

Most research on illicit drug use among gay and bisexual men (GBM) focuses on methamphetamine. However, gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB) is becoming increasingly popular for chemsex, which has been implicated in increased HIV risk behaviours among GBM. We investigate factors associated with GHB use.

Methods:

Flux is an online prospective observational study of Australian GBM. The study aimed to determine factors associated with GHB use and its association with overdose.

We used multivariate binary logistic regression analyses to estimate adjusted odds ratios (aOR) and associated 95% confidence intervals (95%CI).

Results:

Among 3190 GBM, the mean age was 35.0 years. One in five men (19.5%) had ever used GHB, 5.4% reported use within the past 6 months (recent use), and 2.7% had used monthly or more frequently. Almost two thirds reported sex as a motivation for recent GHB use (65.1%).

Recent GHB use was independently associated with living with HIV (aOR=1.63; 95%CI=1.03-2.56); greater social engagement with gay men who use drugs (aOR=2.16; 95%CI=1.96-2.38); more sexual partners (aOR=1.00; 95%CI=1.00-1.01); group sex (aOR=1.88; 95%CI=1.36-2.60); and condomless anal intercourse with casual partners (aOR=3.43; 95%CI=2.07-5.70) .

One third of GHB users had ever overdosed (34.2%) men who used GHB at least monthly were at increased risk of overdose (aOR=1.82; 95%CI=1.08-3.01).

Conclusion:

Among those who recently used GHB, most did so infrequently, often in the context of chemsex. Men who used GHB once a month or more frequently were at greater risk of overdose. GHB use should be considered alongside other drugs that have been implicated in sexual risk behaviour and HIV transmission. Harm-reduction interventions, including PrEP eligibility guidelines, need to consider the particular impact of frequent GHB use among men who use GHB for chemsex.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The Flux Study is funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project. In 2018, this study was partly funded by the Gilead Australia Fellowship: Research Grants Program. Gilead Australia Fellowship had no input in the data collection, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of any findings.