

Psychological Distress and Sexually Transmitted Infection Risk in Young South Australians

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Background:

There is a disproportionate burden of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in people with mental illness. This study aimed to better understand the relationship between psychological distress and STI risk in young South Australians based on findings of the 2019 *Let's Talk About It* online sexual health survey.

Methods:

The *Let's Talk About It* survey collected anonymous data from 2380 South Australian residents aged 16-29 years on demographics, behaviour, knowledge and health service access relating to sexual health. The Kessler 6 psychological distress scale was also included. K6 scores were defined as low (6-18) or high (19-30), reflecting the probability of mental illness. Logistic regression analysis was performed to examine associations between high K6 scores and STI risk behaviours: inconsistent condom use, no condom use at last sex, intercourse with 3 or more partners in last 12 months, previous STI diagnosis, drunk or high at last sex, last sex unwanted and sexual debut before 16 years.

Results:

Twenty eight percent of respondents (n = 581) recorded a high K6 score. On univariate analysis, a high K6 score was associated with three or more partners in the last 12 months (OR=1.45, 95%CI 1.15-1.8; P <0.01), last sex unwanted (OR= 2.77, 95%CI 1.79- 4.27; P <0.001), drunk or high at last sex (OR = 1.8, 95%CI 1.4 – 2.3; P< 0.001) and early sexual debut (oral (OR= 1.53, 95%CI 1.22-1.90; P <0.001), vaginal (OR= 1.51, 95%CI 1.19-1.91; P <0.01) and anal (OR= 2.15, 95%CI 1.28-3.60; P <0.01)). On multivariate analysis, odds of reporting unwanted sex were 2.4 times higher in those with a high K6 score (aOR = 2.4, 95%CI 1.5 - 4.0; P=0.001).

Conclusion:

Young South Australians experiencing psychological distress were more likely to report unwanted sex. More research is necessary to better understand the relationship between mental and sexual health.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: nothing to disclose