

High risk sexual behaviours and the associated risk of HIV and STI transmission connected to the use of methamphetamine among heterosexuals

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Background

People who use methamphetamine are known to engage in risky sexual behaviours, associated with this is the risk of HIV and sexually transmissible infections (STIs). The majority of research and health promotion messaging regarding sex and methamphetamine use in Australia has focused on men who have sex with men (MSM) within the context of Chemsex. AIVL's work examines a broader demographic of people who use methamphetamine.

Approach

Using an exploratory qualitative design (focus groups), in late 2018, AIVL engaged with 35 representatives and delegates from its 9 drug user peer-based organisations. Trends and commonalities presented were informed by the interactions and observations of people who use drugs who engage with the services and programs offered by the attending organisations. Discussions highlighted the theme of high-risk sexual behaviours as a result of using methamphetamine. A desktop literature review was subsequently conducted.

Outcomes

Unlike Chemsex, there is a cohort of heterosexual people who use drugs whose primary reason for using is not predominantly to enhance sexual activity. However, given the nature of the drug, users tend to engage in high risk sexual activities. International studies have shown these behaviours to be; unprotected sex, marathon sex (long lasting sex), multiple sexual partners and the propensity to engage in anal sex. People who use methamphetamine report sexual activity lasting longer and being rougher which can result in chaffing, sores and tears therefore increasing the potential of blood to blood contact during sex.

Innovation and significance

Australian-based research regarding this aspect of sexual health and methamphetamine use is lacking. An evidence-informed understanding of HIV transmission risk associated with risky sexual practices among the broader Australian demographic of people who use methamphetamine - beyond the scope of MSM and Chemsex, is required to help better inform public health policy and health promotion activities targeted to this cohort.

Disclosure

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