

Information-Seeking Behaviours in a Sample of Australian Chemsex Users

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Introduction/Issues: Chemsex refers to using illicit substances to facilitate sexual experiences in men who have sex with men. Chemsex has been linked to negative impacts on psychological, social, and physical health and wellbeing. Little is known about information-seeking behaviours in this population. This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of seeking and engaging with health information.

Methods/Approach: Self-identified chemsex users (N=184) participated in an anonymous cross-sectional survey. Variables included chemsex engagement; knowledge, perception and use of harm-reduction information, and associated health and support services. Pearson correlation and ANOVAs were conducted. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank and Friedman tests were applied to analyse perceived trustworthiness information sources.

Key Findings: Chemsex was frequent and represented a meaningful part of sexual events. Most knew where to access professional help and harm-reduction information, but worried about being judged by health professionals. Most did not feel comfortable discussing chemsex with health professionals except with sexual health doctors/counsellors. Few users discussed health risks with a professional. Information on chemsex was received through multiple sources with significant differences in perceived relevance and trustworthiness, with sexual health doctors/nurses ranked the most trustworthy information. Interest in non-traditional sources of information was low except for formal peer networks and anonymous personal expert advice.

Discussions and Conclusions: Engagement with health professionals and harm-reduction information is limited in this population, despite high risk and negative health outcomes. Results suggest that new and combined approaches are necessary to reach this population, including peer support networks, anonymous personal advice and changing community attitudes toward chemsex.

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