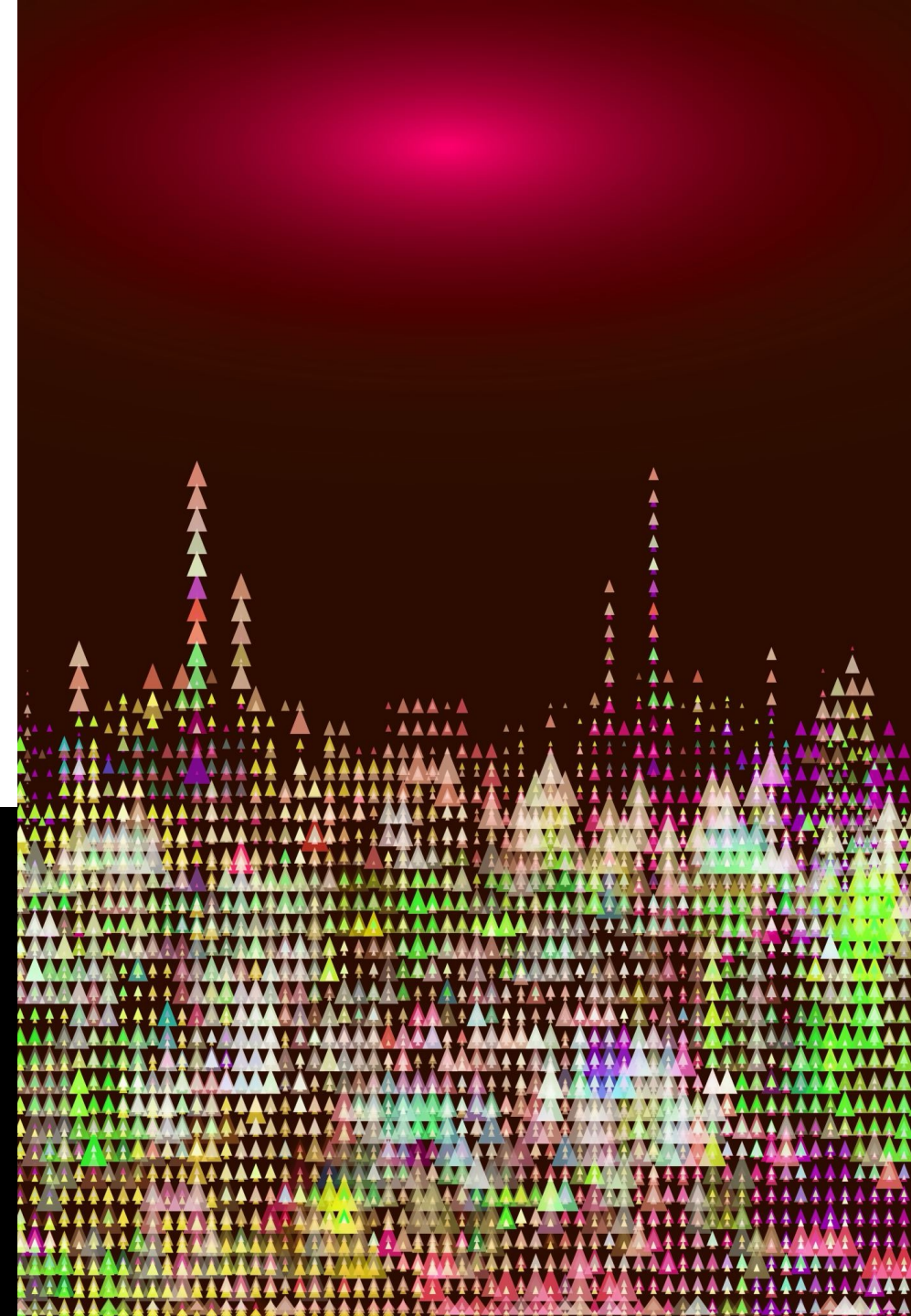


CONTEXTUALIZING RISK ASSOCIATED WITH CHEMSEX

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DISCLOSURES

None

OBJECTIVES

- To define chemsex and examine its prevalence
- To explore some of the health risks associated with chemsex

QUESTION 1

What is the best definition of chemsex?

- A. Intentional sex while under the influence of alcohol
- B. Intentional sex while under the influence of drugs
- C. Intentional sex while using medications to treat erectile dysfunction
- D. All of the above

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QUESTION 2

What behavioral and health risks are associated with chemsex?

- A. Condomless sex
- B. Methamphetamine (METH) and/or gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB) use
- C. Multiple sexual partners
- D. Sexual partners with and without HIV and those with unknown HIV status
- E. Increased risk of HIV, Hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- F. All of the above

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DEFINITION OF CHEMSEX

A global phenomenon, chemsex is a form of sexualized drug use defined as the use of psychoactive drugs immediately before or during intentional sexual activity to facilitate, prolong and/or intensify the sexual experience.

- METH
- GHB/GBL (Gamma Butyrolactone)
- Ketamine
- 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA/XTC)
- Mephedrone

May be known as "party and play", PnP, or other terms depending on the region.

It has been conceptualized as a form of sexualized drug use that is specific to MSM and a threat to public health, but these views are controversial.

THERE ARE MANY GAPS IN THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE. THERE ARE A WIDE RANGE OF METHODOLOGIES THAT AFFECT INTERPRETING THE RESEARCH.

Wide variation in methodologies for studying chemsex

- How to define chemsex
- What drugs are associated with chemsex
- How to measure / assess that the drug is used in the context of chemsex

Most data are derived from studies of men who have sex with men (MSM)

- Paucity of data about chemsex among people who are transgender or gender-diverse

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHEMSEX MAY DIFFER AND INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF BENEFITS AND HARMS RELATED TO CHEMSEX

“A medicating of complex issues that inhibit the enjoyment of gay sex such as societal internalised homophobia, the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic within gay cultures, and religious or cultural shame that is often associated with gay sex.”

Stuart 2018

“I want to entertain the possibility of there being a positive value in queer ways of living-with and becoming-with drugs, a value that can be at least as much life-affirming as it is often assumed to be simply life-negating.”

Florêncio 2021

HOW I BECAME INTERESTED IN CHEMSEX RESEARCH

In San Diego, young MSM have the highest rate of HIV infection of any age group

- 3.40 infections per 100 person years

Risk factors of HIV infection among young MSM in San Diego included:

- Condomless sex
- METH and/or GHB use
- Multiple sexual partners
- Partners with HIV or of unknown HIV serostatus
- STIs

Hoenigl et al. 2016

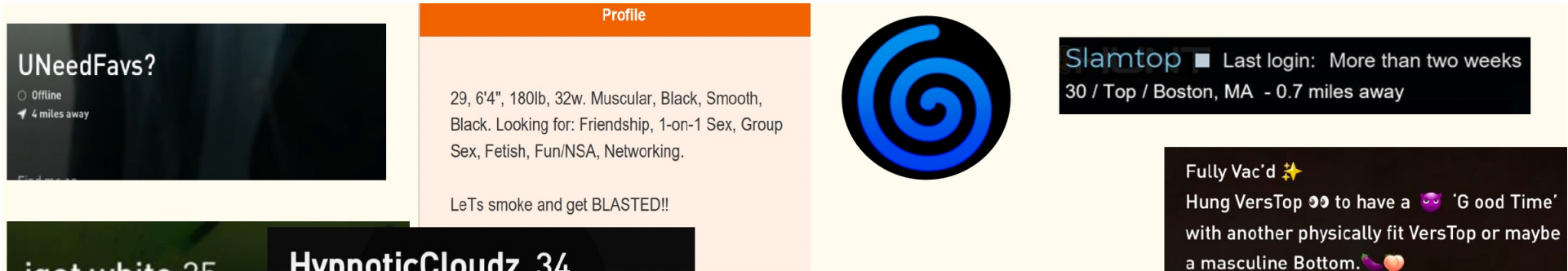
OUR EXPERIENCE IN SAN DIEGO IS CONSISTENT WITH EXPERIENCE IN THE UK WHICH SHOWED PEOPLE NEWLY DIAGNOSED WITH HIV WERE MORE LIKELY TO ENDORSE CHEMSEX THAN OTHER MSM ATTENDING THE CLINIC

Despite declining HIV incidence from 2013-2019, incident HIV infection in N=1162 MSM from the UK was associated with:

- Injection drug use (IDU)
- Chemsex
- High-risk sexual behavior

Whitlock et al. 2021

PRACTICES OF CHEMSEX VARY FROM PERSON TO PERSON, BUT PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATE IN CHEMSEX OFTEN FIND PARTNERS ONLINE



CHEMSEX AMONG MSM MAY OCCUR IN THE SETTING OF MULTIPLE CONCURRENT PSYCHOSOCIAL CONDITIONS / RISK FACTORS

- Depression
- Prior episodes of neglect or trauma at a young age and earlier age of sexual debut
- Experience of stigma / societal rejection / laws criminalizing sexual orientation and substance use
- Perceptions that
 - METH alleviates the dread of growing old and infirm or fears of becoming less attractive and unwanted
 - Chemsex provides freedom from sexual discrimination and isolation, particularly among MSM with HIV


THERE ARE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON SEXUALIZED DRUG USE, INCLUDING MANY REPORTS OF POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF CHEMSEX PARTICIPANTS AND PARTICIPATION IN CHEMSEX BY NON-MSM

A qualitative study of people who report sexualized drug use, including cisgender, straight-identifying women, suggests these positive experiences with “chemsex”:

- Provide a “chemical connection” to partner / intimacy
- Enhance pleasure and endurance
- Decrease inhibition and increase openness
- Shed prior difficult experiences and “treat” mental health conditions


Moyle et al. 2020

A STUDY FROM SINGAPORE SHOWS THAT CHEMSEX HAS A PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO METH AND GHB.

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3-MONTH PREVALENCE OF CHEMSEX AMONG PEOPLE IN UK ATTENDING SEXUAL HEALTH/HIV CLINICS DEMONSTRATES CHEMSEX IS FAR MORE COMMON AMONG MSM IRRESPECTIVE OF HIV STATUS


People without HIV

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People with HIV

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CLINIC-BASED SAMPLES OF MSM AND TRANSGENDER & GENDER-DIVERSE ADULTS GLOBALLY REPORT A SIMILAR 12-MONTH PREVALENCE OF CHEMSEX, WITH A POSSIBLE LOWER PREVALENCE AMONG A COMMUNITY-BASED SAMPLE OF TRANSGENDER WOMEN IN CAMBODIA

- 12-month prevalence of 24% among a sample of cisgender MSM with HIV at HIV clinics in UK, Greece, Spain, and Italy (N=1589)
- 12-month prevalence of 24% among a sample of predominately cisgender MSM initiating PrEP in Montreal (N=2,923; 16 were transgender men and women)
- 3-month prevalence of 6.5% among transgender women in Cambodia recruited through respondent-driven sampling / 20% transgender or non-binary/gender fluid registrants to London's online sexual health service

Yi et al. 2017; Whitlock et al 2021; Anato et al. 2021; Day et al. 2021

THERE ARE IMPORTANT HEALTH-RELATED CONCERNS:
DATA FROM THE UK SHOWED CHEMSEX IS ASSOCIATED
WITH MANY RISK BEHAVIORS

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INJECTION DRUG USE, AND INJECTION DRUG USE INITIATION, IS COMMON IN THE CONTEXT OF CHEMSEX

Of the 71 MSM who reported IDU when presenting for HIV/STI testing in Spain, 81.9% first injected and drugs in the setting of sex

27% of MSM with HIV in Europe participating in chemsex inject drugs during chemsex ("slamsex")

Chen et al. 2021; Whitlock et al. 2021; Guerras et al. 2021; Hanum et al. 2021; Aguirrenengoa et al. 2021; Perera et al. 2017

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHEMSEX IN BRAZIL DURING COVID-19


Worse social distancing
with chemsex, more casual
sex, group sex, and PrEP
use

Sousa et al. 2020



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HIGHER RATES OF RISK BEHAVIORS ARE ACCOMPANIED BY HIGHER RATES OF HIV, HEPATITIS C (HCV), AND STIs AMONG CHEMSEX PARTICIPANTS

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Pakianathan et al. 2018

CHEMSEX IS ASSOCIATED WITH WORSE ADHERENCE TO DAILY, ORAL HIV TREATMENT

Chemsex among people with HIV is associated with poor adherence to HIV medication (UK and Taiwan) and marginally associated with worse viral suppression (Taiwan)

Chen et al. 2021; Whitlock et al. 2021; Guerras et al. 2021; Hanum et al. 2021; Aguirrenengoa et al. 2021; Perera et al. 2017

ADHERENCE / RETENTION ON HIV PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PrEP) IS GENERALLY POOR FOR PEOPLE WHO DO AND DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN CHEMSEX


Chemsex is not a barrier to being prescribed PrEP or PrEP retention in Montreal (Figure) or Amsterdam

No difference in self-reported adherence to oral daily PrEP between chemsex and non-chemsex groups in London

- 33.2% of entire sample had less than 100% adherence)

Chemsex was associated with a higher rate of “uncovered events” with oral event-related PrEP in Belgium but not in IPERGAY (Paris)

Roux et al. 2018; Vuyelsteke et al. 2021; O’Halloran et al. 2019; Anato 2021; Coyer et al. 2020

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METHODOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES (AND POSSIBLY THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE) LIKELY EXPLAIN DIVERGENT FINDINGS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH AMONG CHEMSEX PARTICIPANTS

Australians with HIV who used chemsex drugs reported greater social connection

- Lower levels of perceived HIV-related stigma
- Higher levels of support from other people with HIV and LGBT friends
- No difference in depression, anxiety or emotional well-being

In a UK sample, 40.6% reported unwanted psychosocial problems as a result of chemsex

- Problems with substance use withdrawal (21.2%)
- Occupational difficulties (25.1%)
- Social difficulties (24.3%)
- Relationship difficulties (28.3%)


Power et al. 2018; Whitlock et al. 2021

THERE ARE LIKELY HIGHER RATES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG CHEMSEX PARTICIPANTS

In a German sample, chemsex was associated with mental health problems and trauma

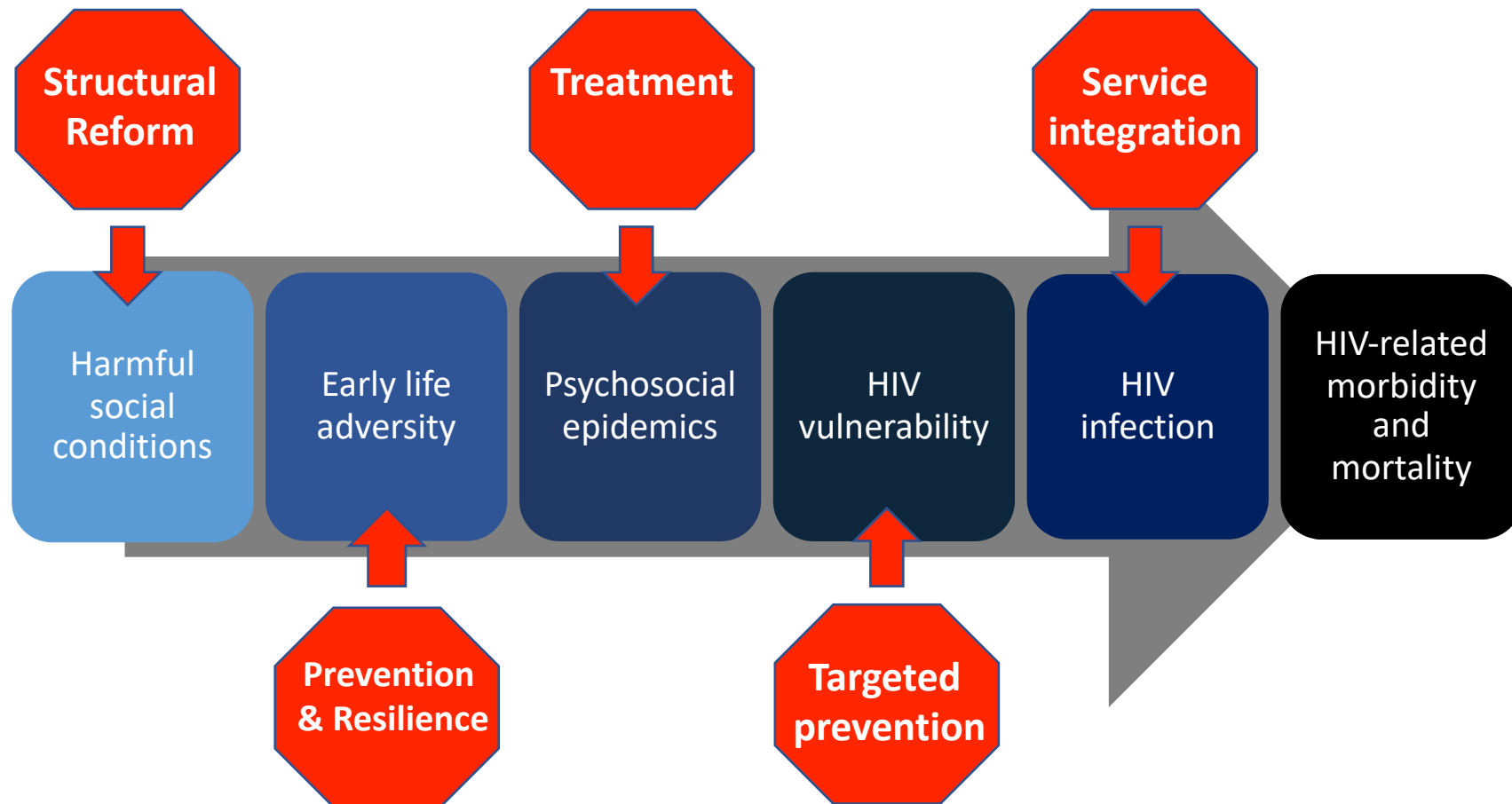
- Depression
- Somatization
- Anxiety
- Number of traumatic events
- Violation of their sexual boundaries

Bohn et al. 2020

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WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE HARM RELATED TO CHEMSEX?



SUMMARY

A global phenomenon

Appears common, at least among MSM and people who are transgender in HIV care or receiving sexual health services

Associated with greater risk of HIV, HCV, STIs, and COVID-19

Incongruence of findings likely represent differences in methodologies and theoretical perspectives

Not all drugs are created equally, and METH might be particularly problematic among drugs associated with chemsex