

Drug consumption and health behaviour among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Germany.

27th ESSD Annual Conference
23.09.2016

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Background

- High prevalences of club drugs (chems) among MSM compared to age-comparable heterosexual men (e.g. Drewes/Kruspe 2016)
- Chemsex: sex that occurs under the influence of drugs taken immediately preceding and/or during the sexual session (Bourne et al. 2014)
- Practical experience: in Germany, MSM increasingly seek support in community organizations due to sexualised drug use (Dichtl et al. 2016)

Research questions – Research design

- What are the **experiences** of MSM regarding the use of drugs in general and chemsex in particular?
- Which **motives** are important for the use of drugs in sexual settings?
- What is the **impact** of drug use on **well-being**?
- Do MSM perceive **any form of relation** between **drug use and sexual risk-taking**?
 - **exploratory qualitative** study
 - content analysis of 14 semi-structured interviews with MSM in Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt/Main

Sociodemographic characteristics of the interviewees (N = 14)

Age distribution

4: 26-35 yrs
6: 36-45 yrs
4: 46-60 yrs

12 = HIV+

5 = HCV+

Residence

6: Cologne
5: Berlin
3: Frankfurt/Main

Graduation

8: university entrance
2: intermediate school-leaving certificate
3: secondary modern school
1: no completion of schooling



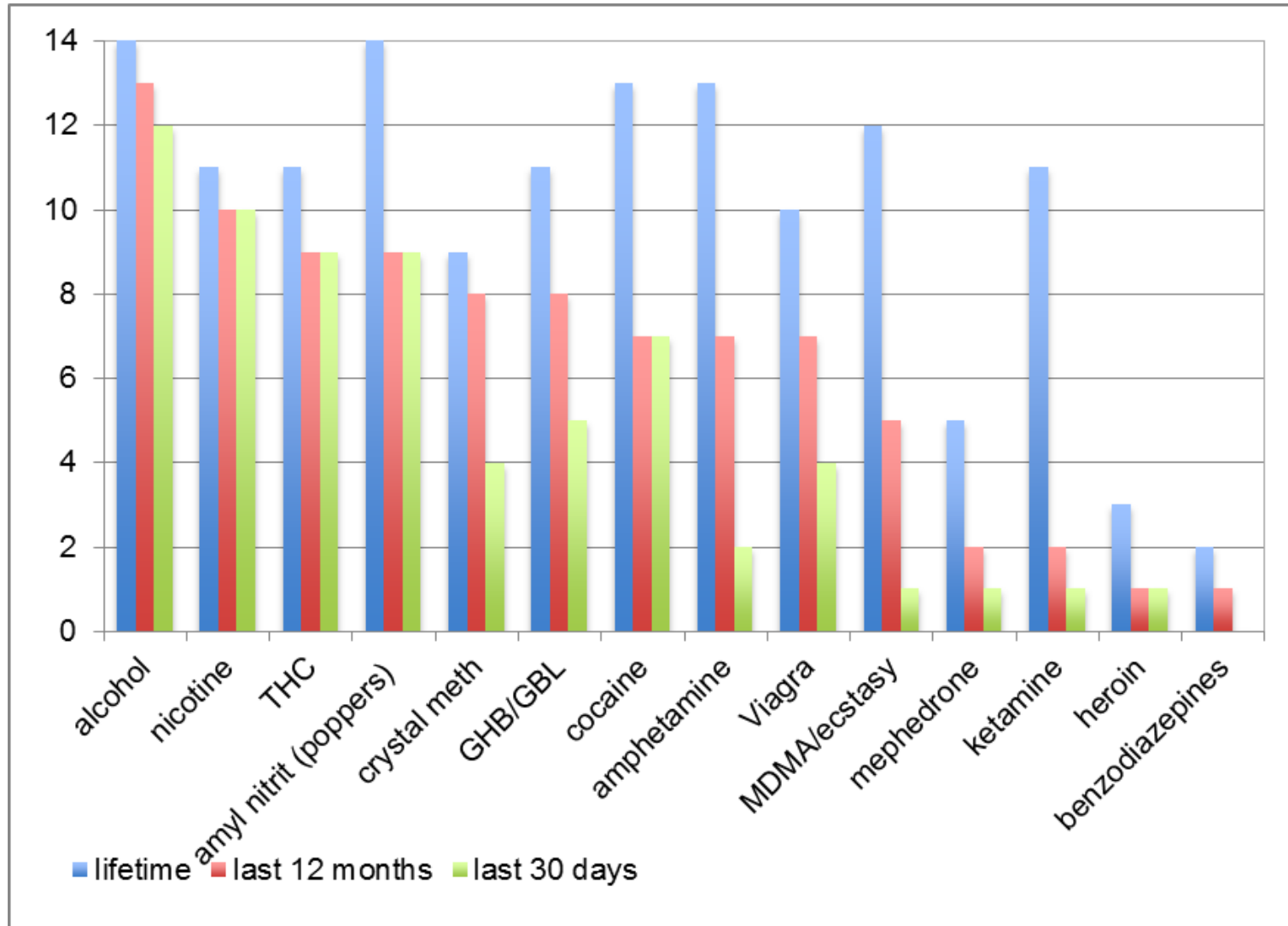
Postsecondary education

7: higher education degree
5: vocational training
4: no further education

Income

5: regular salaries/independent work
10: state transfer payments (e.g. sickness benefits, unemployment benefit)

Drug use: prevalences



Settings of drug use

Three main settings of drug use:

- **party setting:** amphetamines, cocaine, MDMA/ecstasy
- **everyday life setting:** alcohol, cannabis, nicotine
- **sexual setting:** poppers, amphetamines (**crystal meth**), **GHB/GBL**, cocaine, ketamine

Motivations for sexualized drug use

Intensification of sexual feelings

physical level

enhancement of sexual performance
(e.g. prolonged erection, delayed
ejaculation, stimulation of sexual
arousal)

enabling specific sexual practices (e.g.
lower perception of pain, relaxation of
anal musculature)

psychological level

disinhibition
(e.g. overcoming shame, acting out
sexual fantasies, reinforcement of
communication skills)

recreation, fun
(e.g. distraction from everyday life)

strengthening self-confidence

recognition by peers

- Importance of norms of sexuality, body and health
- internalised homonegativity

Impacts of drug use on well-being -physical, psychological-

- **positive:**
 - intense, extended sexual experiences
 - ability to have sexual encounters
- **negative:**
 - (unintended) loss of control: experiences of violence and physical injuries during sexual encounters, risk-taking
 - changes in sexuality: loss of sexual arousal → inability to have sex without the use of drugs
 - overdosing, increased aggression, depressions/psychoses, hallucinations etc.
 - negative impacts on social life: problems in work environment and private settings

Sexualized drug use & sexual health

12 men HIV+, 5 men HCV+, reports of other (recurring) STIs

- difficulties to stick to safe sex and safe use strategies when using drugs regularly (esp. GHB/GBL, crystal meth)
→ transmission of STIs

BUT:

- overcoming fear of rejection and transmission
- drug use as a coping strategy: acting out sexuality after diagnosis of HIV

Priorities for future research

- How far does sexualized drug use serve as a coping strategy with HIV?
- How could effective risk management strategies involving chemsex look like?
- What role do social *and* MSM community norms play in the context of chemsex ?

Thank you!

Bourne A; Reid D; Hickson F; Torres Rueda S; Weatherburn P (2014): The Chemsex study: drug use in sexual settings among gay & bisexual men in Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham. London: Sigma Research.

Dichtl, Anna; Graf, Niels; Sander, Dirk (2016): QUADROS. Modellprojekt „Qualitätsentwicklung in der Beratung und Prävention im Kontext von Drogen und Sexualität bei schwulen Männern“. Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, Berlin.

Drewes, Jochen; Kruspe, Martin (2016): Schwule Männer und HIV/AIDS 2013. Schutzverhalten und Risikomanagement in den Zeiten der Behandelbarkeit von HIV. Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, Berlin.