INTRODUCTION

Recreational drug use has been linked with HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic, with the commonest substances in the early days being ‘street drugs’ such as opiates, crack and cocaine.

In the past few years, other recreational drugs have become more frequently used among MSM and bisexual men, especially within HIV-positive patients.

These, commonly called ‘party drugs’ or ‘club drugs’, are consumed in club or house parties, and are often used during sex, which can last for several days. They consist of a mix of agents such as methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), ketamine, benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam) – and of substances that are more specifically used in a sexualized context: methamphetamine, mephedrone, poppers and erectile dysfunction agents (EDA).

According to the recently published ASTRA study, of 2248 HIV/MSM surveyed for HIV-related, socio-demographic and lifestyle factors, half of the individuals (1138, 50.6%) reported use of recreational drugs in the previous three months. About a quarter of them reported use of at least three types of drugs during that time period.

Consumption of party drugs during sexual activity (‘ChemSex’) in people living with HIV (PLWH) on combination antiretroviral therapy (cART) poses significant risks for the acquisition of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and has recently dramatically contributed to the expansion of the HIV epidemic.

OBJECTIVES

To identify trends and determine risks, motivations and consequences of ChemSex behaviour, we collected data on 874 individuals attending a ChemSex support service in a London sexual health clinic over the course of one year.

METHODS

Individuals were asked by substance use support workers to disclose details of their behaviour and risk, including condom use, injecting drug use and frequency of drug-using episodes, cART adherence, number of partners, HIV/hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, experience of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and experience of chem-free sex.

Data were collected into a secure database and percentages of event recurrences calculated.

RESULTS

ChemSex: Data on Recreational Drug Use and Sexual Behaviour in Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) from a Busy Sexual Health Clinic in London, UK

David Stuart1,2, Nneka Nwokolo1,2,3, Alan McOwan1,2, Margherita Bracchi2,3, Marta Boffito1,2,3,4

156 Dean Street, London, UK; 2Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, London, UK; 3St Stephen’s AIDS Trust, London, UK; 4Imperial College, London, UK

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