

SELF-PERCEIVED PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP WITH DRUGS AND THE USE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG (AOD) SERVICES AMONG GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN

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Background: There is significant overlap in the use of stimulant drugs and sexual behaviours that carry an increased risk of HIV or STI transmission among gay and bisexual men (GBM). Little literature has documented whether and where men seek help to manage their drug use

Methods: The Following Lives Undergoing Change (Flux) Study is a national, online prospective observational cohort investigating drug use among Australian GBM recruited via social networking and gay community sites. Between September 2014 and July 2015, a total of 2177 men provided useable baseline data on their use of AOD services.

Results: Half (50.8%) of respondents had used illicit drugs within the previous 6 months and one in seven (15.7%) of those considered their use to be problematic. Those who perceived their use of drugs as problematic reported they would feel more comfortable engaging with doctors, psychologists or counsellors as opposed to 12-step programs, detox or methadone clinics. Men who considered their drug use problematic and those who did not were most likely to report obtaining information about drugs from gay organisations (28.8% and 17.2% respectively) or from a HIV organisation (32.5% and 16.1% respectively). Less than half (42.9%) of those who considered their use problematic had used AOD services, and those who had were more likely to be HIV positive (aOR 1.89, 95%CI 1.13-3.09) and scored higher on a measure of depression (aOR 1.08, 95%CI 1.05-1.11).

Conclusion: Rates of drug use are high among GBM, many of whom consider themselves as problematic users, and yet, less than half of those who described their use as problematic had accessed AOD services. Many traditional AOD programmes were perceived as less comfortable environments. Sexual health clinics and gay organisations could play a key role in provision of harm reduction, treatment and support interventions for GBM.

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