

THE MEANINGS OF INJECTING IN SEXUALISED DRUG-USE SETTINGS AMONG GAY MEN LIVING WITH HIV

Murphy DA^{1,2}, Ellard J³, Brener L⁴, Fraser N⁵ and Murray J⁶

¹ Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, University of Sydney, ² Kirby Institute, UNSW, ³ Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, ⁴ Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW, ⁵ Positive Life NSW, ⁶ National Association of People With HIV Australia.

Introduction: Australia's national strategy for HCV identifies people living with HIV as a priority population. Annual incidence of HCV among gay and bisexual men living with HIV in Australia is over 2%. Diagnoses of HCV among HIV-negative men have also recently been increasing. The *EntryPoint* study aimed to identify points of intervention (places, practices, times) for peer education about HCV testing, treatment and prevention within adventurous sexual subcultures.

Methods: Qualitative data were collected from 17 men through individual face-to-face interviews, a focus group interview, and the observations of three peer-ethnographers recruited from within the study-participant group. All participants were gay men living with HIV who self-identified as sexually adventurous. This analysis includes men who reported any recent injecting drug use.

Results: The drug that these men reported injecting was crystal methamphetamine, and it was always in the context of sex. Almost all had experiences of being injected by, and/or injecting, someone else. While these cross-administering practices reduce certain harms, they also present potential risks for HCV transmission. Some of these risks (related to syringe disposal, and blood around the injection site) are exacerbated in a context where the immediate transition from injecting to sexual activity is highly valued. Another risk for HCV reported by some participants was the recapping of syringes after injecting someone else.

Participants' roles as either the injector or the injected were often based on perceived skills and competence. In addition, these men's accounts provided insights into the relations formed through the act of injecting, including highly scripted and gendered sexual practices, characterised by intense (though often transient) feelings of connectedness and intimacy.

Conclusion: In these scenes, distinguishing drug-use practices from sexual practices is neither possible nor desirable. Also, the performativity of the syringe itself within these events needs to be considered when designing interventions.

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