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Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Usage and Correlates Among Men Who Have Sex with Men Engaging in Chemsex in Bangkok, Thailand

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Introduction

Substance use during sex, or chemsex, is common among men who have sex with men (MSM) and is associated with an increased risk of HIV acquisition. However, this risk can be mitigated through oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), an effective HIV prevention method. This study reports on PrEP use and associated factors among MSM engaging in chemsex.

Methods

Between January 2018 and May 2019, Thai MSM aged 18 years and older were recruited from an HIV testing center in Bangkok, Thailand, for an 18-month longitudinal study on amphetamine-type stimulant use. At each 6-month visit, participants underwent HIV testing and completed a questionnaire assessing self-reported information on demographics, substance use, history of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sex work status, ever PrEP use and interest, and mental health conditions e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Baseline characteristics were analyzed using multivariate logistic regression to identify determinants of PrEP use.

Results

Among 1,375 participants, 121 participants without HIV who practiced chemsex and reported PrEP use status were analyzed. The median age was 29 years. Among them, 19 (15.7%) were sex workers, 14 (11.6%) reported acquiring any STI in the past 6 months, and 23 (19.0%) reported experiencing PTSD symptoms. Among those not using PrEP, 61 (87.1%) expressed interest in starting. In total, 51 participants (42.1%) were using PrEP. Those who reported sex work (aOR 0.12, 95%CI 0.02-0.64) or recent crystal methamphetamine use (aOR 0.25, 95%CI 0.06-0.98) were less likely to report PrEP use, while those with PTSD symptoms were more likely to report PrEP use (aOR 8.06, 95%CI 1.05-61.93).

Conclusions

Approximately, 40% of MSM engaging in chemsex were using PrEP. However, PrEP use was lower among sex workers and those who use crystal methamphetamine. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating sexual health, mental health and harm reduction services, to ensure inclusive PrEP provision.

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Table 1 Baseline characteristics of MSM engaging in chemsex at the baseline visit

	Participants not using	Participants currently using	Total	p-value
	PrEP n (%)	PrEP n (%)		
N (%)	70 (57.9)	51 (42.1)	121 (100.0)	
Age: median (IQR)	29 (24,34)	30 (24,37)	29 (24,36)	
Age (years)				
<25	18 (25.7)	13 (25.5)	31 (25.6)	0.978
≥25	52 (74.3)	38 (74.5)	90 (74.4)	
Current work/study status				
Working	64 (91.4)	40 (80.0)	104 (86.7)	0.057
Studying	6 (8.6)	7 (14.0)	13 (10.8)	
Not working or studying	0 (0.0)	3 (6.0)	3 (2.5)	
STI History in the past 6 months				
Any STI	6 (8.6)	8 (15.7)	14 (11.6)	0.259
None	64 (91.4)	43 (84.3)	107 (88.4)	
Number of sexual partners in the past 6 months				
<5	25 (52.1)	11 (31.4)	36 (43.4)	0.061
≥5	23 (47.9)	24 (68.6)	47 (56.6)	
Condom use in the past 6 months				
≥50%	39 (86.7)	24 (75.0)	63 (81.8)	0.191
<50%	6 (13.3)	8 (25.0)	14 (18.2)	
Sex work in the past 6 months				
No	55 (78.6)	45 (91.8)	100 (84.0)	0.052
Yes	15 (21.4)	4 (8.2)	19 (16.0)	
Have heard of PrEP before				
No	6 (8.6)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.0)	0.032
Yes	64 (91.4)	51 (100.0)	115 (95.0)	
Interested in taking PrEP				
No	6 (8.6)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.0)	
Yes	61 (87.1)	0 (0.0)	61 (50.4)	
Skip/prefer not to say	3 (4.3)	51 (100.0)	54 (44.6)	
ATS use in the past 6 months				
Yes	60 (85.7)	41 (80.4)	101 (83.5)	0.436
No	10 (14.3)	10 (19.6)	20 (16.5)	
Crystal methamphetamine				
Never/ Use more than 6 months	10 (14.3)	11 (21.6)	21 (17.4)	0.296
Used in past 6 months	60 (85.7)	40 (78.4)	100 (82.6)	
PTSD				
Normal score 0-2	59 (86.8)	37 (72.5)	96 (80.7)	0.052
Abnormal score 3-4	9 (13.2)	14 (27.5)	23 (19.3)	

SD, Standard Deviation; IQR, Interquartile Range; ATS, Amphetamine Type Stimulants
Sample t-test, while categorical data were analyzed using Pearson’s chi-squared test or Exact Probability test.

Table 2 Univariable and multivariable analysis on factors associated with PrEP use among MSM engaging in chemsex

	Univariable analysis	95%CI	p-value	Multivariable analysis	95%CI	p-value
	Odd ratio			Adjusted odd ratio		
Age (years)						
<25	1.00	Reference	0.978			
≥25	1.01	0.44-2.31				
Current work/study status						
Working	1.00	Reference				
Studying	1.87	0.59-5.95	0.292			
Not working nor studying	N/A	N/A	N/A			
STI History in the past 6 months						
Any STI	1.98	0.64-6.12	0.233	2.47	0.37-16.65	0.353
None	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
Number of sexual partners in the past 6 months						
<5	1.00	Reference				
≥5	2.37	0.95-5.90	0.063			
Condom use in the past 6 months						
≥50%	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
<50%	2.17	0.67-7.01	0.197	3.87	0.84-17.90	0.083
Sex work in the past 6 months						
No	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
Yes	0.33	0.10-1.05	0.061	0.12	0.02-0.64	0.013
ATS use in the past 6 months						
No	1.00	Reference				
Yes	0.68	0.26-1.79	0.438			
Crystal methamphetamine						
Never/ Use more than 6 months	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
Used in past 6 months	0.61	0.24-1.56	0.299	0.25	0.06-0.98	0.046
Ecstasy						
Never/ Use more than 6 months	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
Used in past 6 months	0.95	0.36-2.46	0.910	0.44	0.07-2.60	0.365
Amphetamine (Yaba)						
Never/More than 6 months	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
Used in past 6 months	1.67	0.53-5.31	0.385	4.67	0.80-27.31	0.087
PTSD						
Normal score 0-2	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
Abnormal score 3-4	2.48	0.98-6.30	0.056	8.06	1.05-61.93	0.045
HADS-A Anxiety score						
Normal score 0-7	1.00	Reference		1.00	Reference	
Borderline score 8-10	1.52	0.53-4.34	0.435	0.80	0.13-4.71	0.802
Abnormal score 11-21	3.13	1.05-9.31	0.040	1.36	0.18-10.40	0.766

OR; Odd ratio; CI; confidence interval; N/A; Not Applicable
Variables with P-value < 0.2 in the univariable analysis or considered relevant based on the literature were included in the multivariable analysis.