

A Collaborative Response to Chemsex & GHB Usage in Ireland

Dr. Kiran Santlal¹, Dr. Fiona Fenton¹, Siobhan O’Dea², Graham Ryall³, Adam Shanley⁴, Susan Donlon⁴, Dr. Susan Clarke⁵, Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald⁶, Dr. Eamon Keenan⁷
¹HSE-National Drug Treatment Centre, ²Gay Men’s Health Service, ³Rialto Community Drug Team, ⁴HIV Ireland, ⁵Infectious Diseases Medicine, St. James’ Hospital, ⁶National Public Health Lead, Social Inclusion and Vulnerable Groups, ⁷National Clinical Lead-Addictions Services

Introduction

Chemsex refers to the *use of substances* to facilitate or enhance sexual experience.

Three most commonly used chemsex drugs in Ireland:

- Cocaine or Crack Cocaine
- Methamphetamines – Crystal Meth (“T” or “Tina”)
- GHB/GBL (“G”) – Gamma Hydroxybutyrate/Gamma Butyrolactone



By 2010:

- GHB/GBL was popularised as a “party drug.” Cheaper & No “hangover” after. Easily obtainable from online
- Virtual social networking increased
- House parties and private sex parties replaced socialising in clubs.

When someone is dependent on GHB/GBL

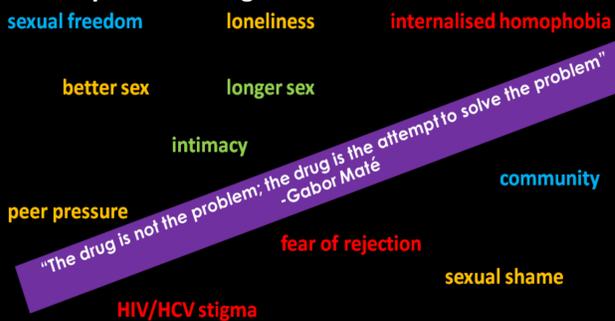
- May experience withdrawal symptoms which can progress in severity very rapidly if untreated
- can result in a medical emergency with potentially fatal complications.

Crystal meth is extremely addictive

- Very little literature about medical detoxification protocol for this substance

Reasons for Drug Use in Chemsex

Using substances during sex is associated with disinhibition, a sense of “exploration and adventure” and euphoric feelings.



Different psychology & different terminology regarding substance misuse in chemsex.

e.g. “I ‘slam’ but ‘addicts’ inject!”

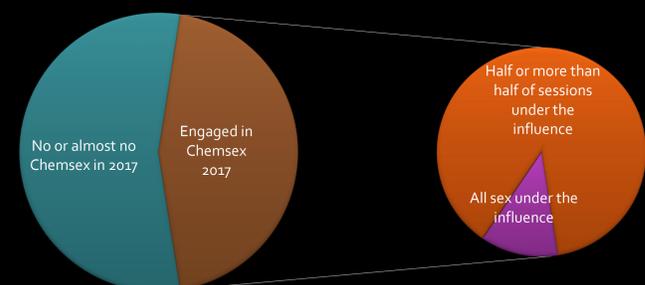
Risk of dependence increased when drugs used to self-medicate underlying mental health problems.

The Chemsex Population

European Men who have sex with Men Internet Survey (EMIS-2017) – 2083 participants in Ireland

Almost 1 in 2 of 1929 men who had sex with men in the previous 12 months did so under the influence.

All or almost all of sex under the influence of alcohol or any drug did so under the influence in 1/8 of this cohort.



Survey done in the Gay Men’s Health Service (2015) – 568 participants

1 in 4 (23%) lost consciousness as a result of Chemsex



Problems Arising from Chemsex

Chemsex parties typically involve:

- Multiple partners
- Polysubstance misuse
- Weekend long “binge sessions”



Phone apps and websites make chemsex more visible and easier to access.

Increasing frequency of G being consumed with “T” (Crystal Meth - smoking/injecting)

“Novel injectors” present with medical & psychiatric complications

Concerning risks of “G&T” use include:

- Overdose & becoming unconscious
- Small Quantities measured
- Different concentrations in samples
- Polysubstance use increases risk
- Non-consensual sex or unprotected sex
- Presenting outside the window period for PEP
- Forgetting to take PrEP

Creating the “Perfect Storm” for HIV, Hepatitis C and/or STI transmission

Chemsex Working Group Ireland

Established to address chemsex and the harms associated with its related substance misuse.

- With the realisation that chemsex was not specific to any one speciality.

Involves the integration and collaboration of governmental & non-governmental organisations within the sectors of Sexual Health, Public Health and Addictions including:

- HIV Ireland
- Gay Men’s Health Service
- Rialto Community Drug Team
- HSE National Drug Treatment Centre
- HSE Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme
- Infectious Diseases Medicine, St. James’ Hospital
- Department of Public Health, Social Inclusion and Vulnerable Groups



Campaigns & Intervention Settings

Innovative campaigns focused more on harm reduction advice, and emphasised personal safety.

This included developing:

G Cards – with information for both individuals and health care professionals

G Poster & Information Fact Sheets

G Harm Reduction video

Ongoing Chemsex Training Workshops – facilitated by GMHS & HIV Ireland

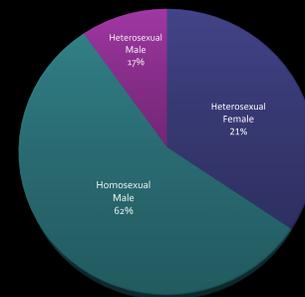
Increased awareness of the Club Drugs Clinic Ireland as a resource for Emergency Departments & Sexual Health Clinics

- Safe and medically supervised detoxification off GHB/GBL

The Club Drugs Clinic Ireland

191 referrals since 2014:

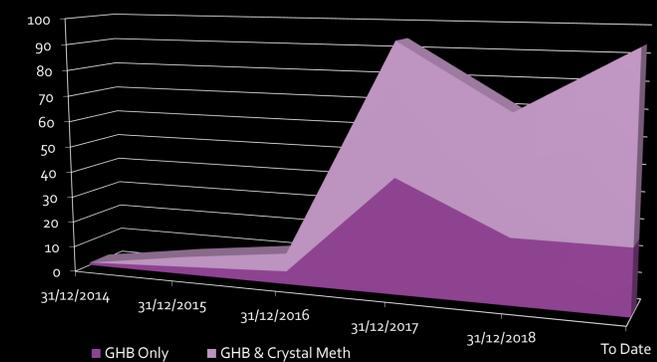
- 4% – admissions to dedicated detoxification ward
- 8% – medical admissions and completed in National Drug Treatment Centre
- 82% – outpatient detoxification episodes with continued support, counselling, and aftercare.



Demographics of the patient population attending the Club Drugs Clinic Ireland

Relapse rate for GHB is approximately 70% in Ireland, and internationally.

Highest risk of relapse – 1 week post detoxification; Reiterates the need for structured, integrated follow up and ongoing Outreach support.



Graph showing increase in presentations with both GHB & Crystal Meth Dependence over the years

Conclusions

The number of referrals to the Club Drugs Clinic Ireland continues to increase – indicative of an ongoing need for a streamlined referral pathway amongst various health services.

Campaigns developed by the Chemsex Working Group Ireland need to continue to engage the public – utilising technology to help achieve this.

Further research needed to continue monitoring and managing mental health, sexual health, consent, provision of party packs, and health promotion messaging.