

## THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF HIV SEXUAL RISK ASSOCIATED WITH NEW TRENDS IN SUBSTANCE USE AMONG SEXUAL MINORITY MEN IN VANCOUVER

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**Background:** Young Gay men (YGM) are constantly challenged with multiple health challenges in the form of serious epidemics of substance use, clinical depression, suicide, high rates of STD's, and histories of early and continuing sexual, physical and social violence. Isolative effects of stigma and marginalization influences greater substance use associated with sex and HIV infection.

**Objectives:** To better understand the issue of rising HIV incidence in a prospective study of YGM, it is necessary to understand the social dynamics of men's intimate sexual lives associated with substance use placing them at increased risk for HIV infection.

**Methods:** Participants were recruited from the Vanguard Project, for which these data were collected through 96 in-depth interviews with 12 HIV-positive cases matched on the basis of age to 12 HIV-negative participants. These ethnographic data were managed through NU\*DIST software supporting our analysis. Themes investigated include early life and experiences with violence, social context, substance use, and sexual careers.

**Results:** Results indicate early histories of sexual, physical and social violence are more prevalent among the cases. Men participate in many kinds of sexual relationships including serial and non-serial relationships with many HIV sero-discordant partners. HIV seroconverters reported using drugs as a means to socialize, mediate past trauma, disinhibit or disengage in order to facilitate sex. New trends of substance use including methamphetamine [MA] were specifically associated with casual group sex and unprotected 'bottoming'. MA could be described as dangerous due to properties that elicit pseudo intimacy, support disinhibitive sexual behavior, and potentiate sexual bingeing.

**Conclusions:** YGM's sexual risks are amplified by new trends in substance abuse and especially MA. The HIV risks associated with MA use must be better understood by HIV interventionists.