

Male sex workers and ICT: Anthropological approach of male sex workers and the different practices online: bareback, PrEP and chemsex

Sampling: who are the male sex workers?

The research project focused on the interconnection and relations between male sex work, ICT (information and communication technology), bareback (condomless sex), PrEP and chemsex. The research was developed and led by a male sex worker with direct contact and connection with the community. In-depth interviews (with 10 male sex workers) and discussions on social media (two Facebook sex workers groups of 536 and 71 people) took place between February 2017 and March 2019. The participants were based in 7 cities in Western Europe (see map) and of various ages, ethnic background or migration status.

Bareback & PrEP

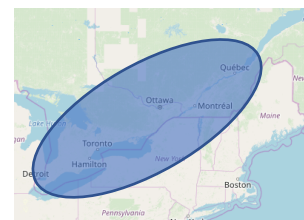
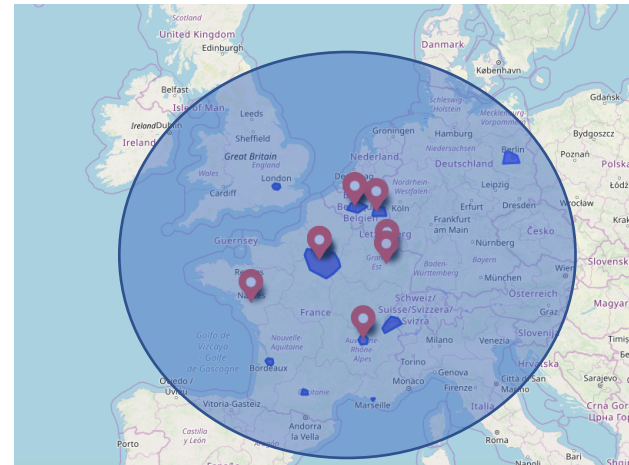
Participants identified an increase in barebacking practices in the MSM/gay sex scene in West Europe associated with the democratisation and better access to PrEP. In many cities/countries in West Europe, sex workers can be recognised as a target group and can have free access to PrEP. One potential negative consequence recognised by the participants was the increasing pressure by clients for bareback sex - based on accessibility of PrEP (for both clients and sex workers).

Chemsex

Chemsex (use of recreational drugs in sexualised settings) was widespread amongst participants. Several male sex workers used chemsex as a way to attract more clients and income. However, knowledge about drugs effects and side effects, interaction with other medicine, impact on mental and physical health was limited. Impact of drug use of sex workers' agency and consent, respect of sexual and professional boundaries were also topics of discussion and reflexion amongst research participants. Many MSW identified crossing pre-agreed boundaries with clients in chemsex settings.

Another category of participants were MSM using chemsex in their personal life and gradually developing addictive behaviour, then engaging in transactional sex/sex work (exchanging sex for drugs) without identifying as sex workers.

Many MSW also identified precarity and high levels of competition between MSW as reason to engage in chemsex with clients.



Region of activities for sex workers interviewed during the research. Note: the majority of them are mobile for their professional activity.

For a coherent chemsex & PrEP response

- Use of chemsex by male sex workers can be a response to precarity and high competition between male sex workers for clients.
- Harm reduction services must develop a more nuanced approach to potential harms associated with chemsex in context of male sex work.
- Impact of drug use on consent and sexual/professional boundaries deserve more attention by the sex workers communities and services related to sex work and sexual health.
- Many MSM engaging in transactional sex in chemsex settings do not identify as sex workers which limits their involvement in sex workers' services and community programmes. Outreach and services must take this into consideration.
- The criminalisation of drug use, possession and sale can negatively impact male sex workers - who can act as 'dealers' in some context - and limit their access to justice and safety.
- The criminalisation of sex work, migration, drug use, possession and sale can negatively impact male sex workers - who can act as 'dealers' in some context - and limit their access to justice and safety.
- Resources on harm reduction in context of MSW must be developed in meaningful collaboration with MSW.