

A Collaborative Response to Chemsex & GHB Usage in Ireland

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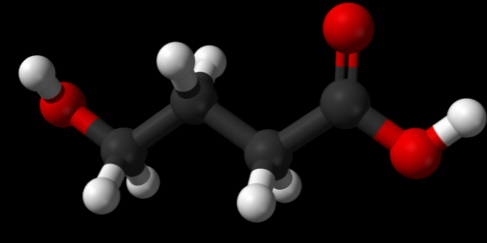
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Introduction

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

Three drugs most commonly used are:

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



GHB - initially designed for anaesthetic uses. Then used by body builders to increase muscle mass. **1990’s** - Used recreationally due to euphoric effects without the “hangover feeling” afterwards. **Early 2000’s** – Underground raves abated and GHB - use surfaced into mainstream clubs

By **2010**, it was popularised as a “party drug.”

- Cheaper & No “hangover” after

Around this time, *virtual social networking* increased. With the recession, *house parties* and *sex parties* also replaced socialising in clubs.

G withdrawal symptoms can *progress* in severity very *rapidly* if treated inadequately

- can result in a *medical emergency* with potentially fatal complications.

Reasons for Drug Use in Chemsex

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

sexual freedom loneliness internalised homophobia

better sex longer sex

intimacy

peer pressure

community

fear of rejection

sexual shame

HIV/HCV stigma

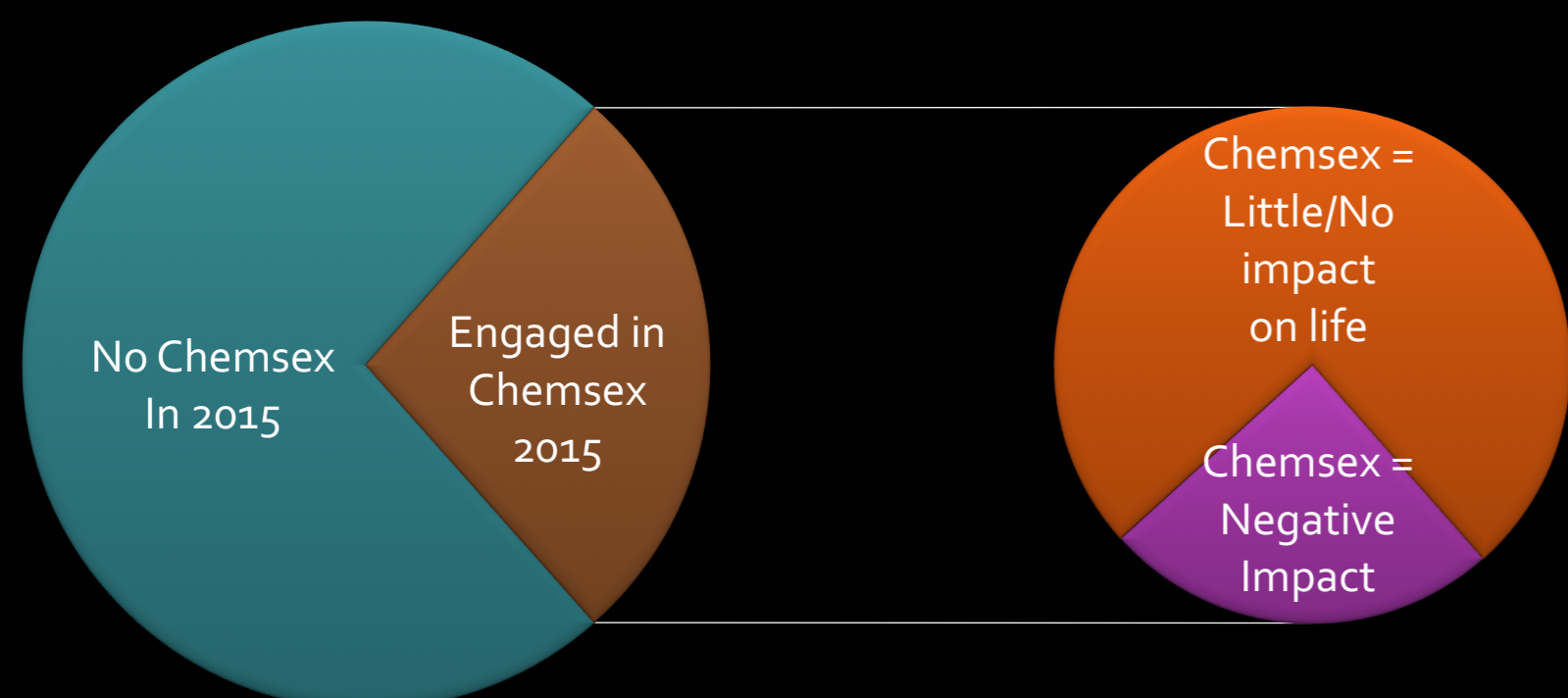
“The drug is not the problem; the drug is the attempt to solve the problem”
-Gabor Maté

GHB is readily available online, and can be imported in large quantities into Ireland legally for industrial uses – then sold in smaller quantities.

Different psychology & different terminology regarding substance misuse in chemsex. e.g. “I ‘slam’ but ‘junkies’ inject!”

The Chemsex Population

Survey of MSM by the Gay Men’s Health Service (2016) – **568** participants



1 in 4 (27%) – engaging in Chemsex in the previous 12 months.

Chemsex impacted *negatively* on the lives of **1/4 of this cohort**

Half had taken **2 or more drugs** during Chemsex

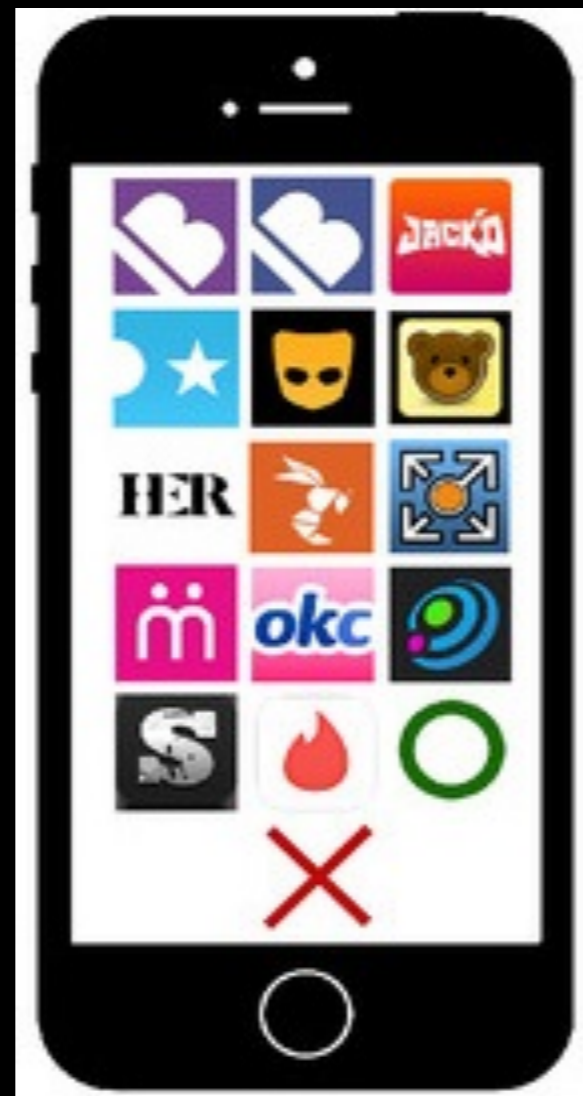


1 in 5 (23%) lost consciousness as a result of Chemsex

Problems Arising from Chemsex

Chemsex is prevalent mainly, but not exclusively, among the **gay, bisexual, and MSM population**.

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



Chemsex parties typically involve:

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

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

“Novel injectors” present with physical and mental complications

Concerning risks as a result of “G&T” use include:

- **Overdose** & becoming unconscious
- **Small Quantities** measured
- Different **concentrations** in samples
- **Polysubstance** use increases risk
- **Non-consensual sex**
- **Unprotected sex**
- Presenting outside the window period for **PEP**

Chemsex Working Group Ireland

Established to address chemsex and the harms associated with its related substance misuse by developing innovative **harm reduction & awareness campaigns**.

Involves the integration and collaboration of governmental & non-governmental organisations within the **Sexual Health sector** and the **Addictions sector** 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

Primary – harm reduction advice & information dissemination

Secondary – detecting the harmful use of GHB

Tertiary – managing the harmful effects of chemsex and substance misuse, detoxification, and rehabilitation

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

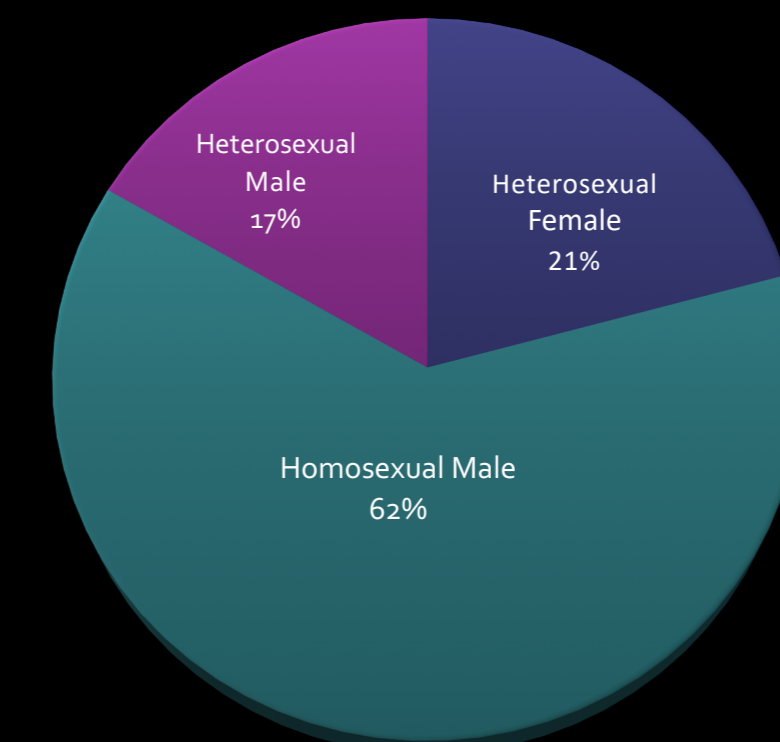
The Club Drugs Clinic Ireland

159 G detoxification episodes since 2014:

8 – admissions to *St. Michael’s Ward*, Beaumont Hospital, HSE NDTc

16 – admissions under the care of *medical teams*, and completed in NDTc

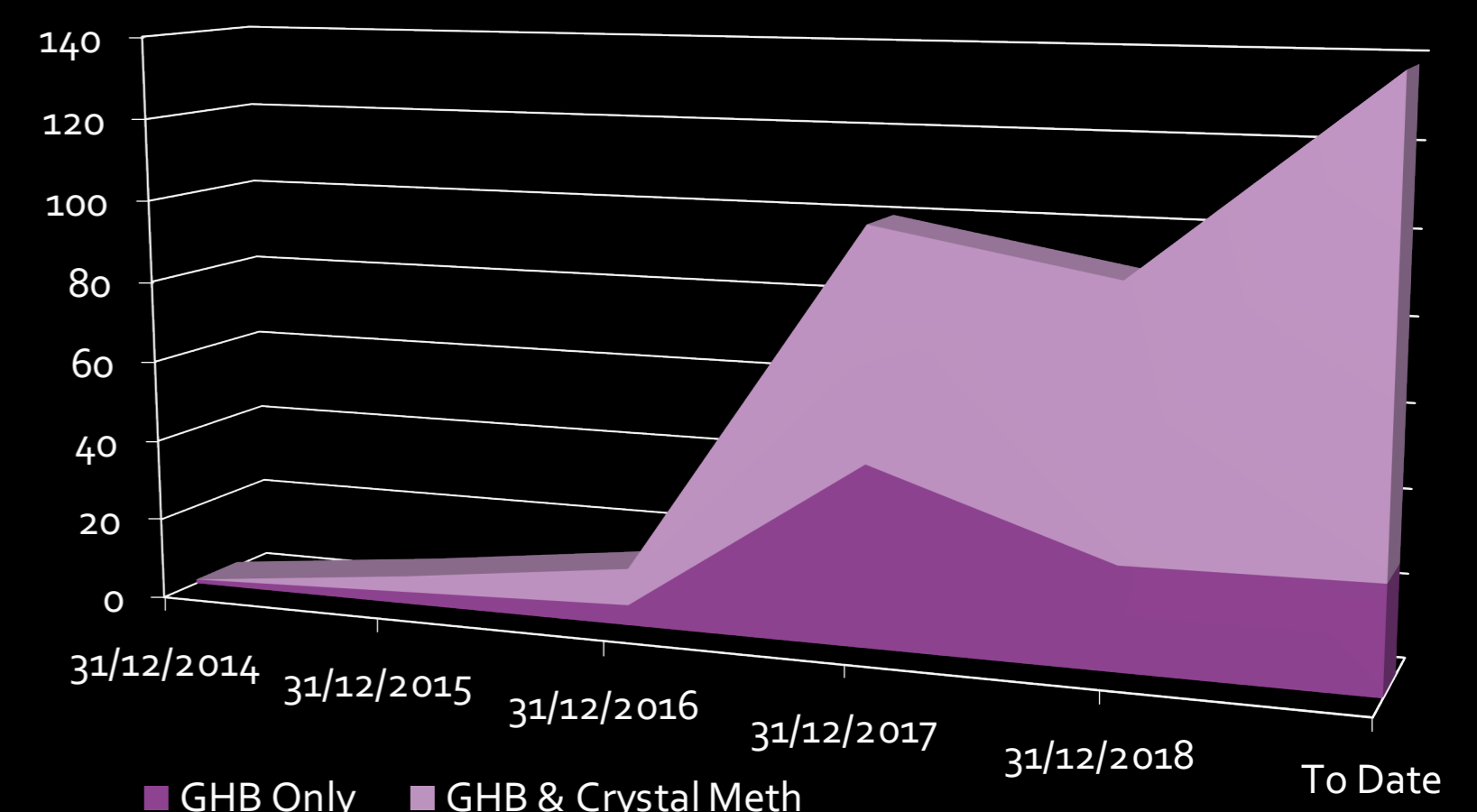
135 – *outpatient* detoxification episodes with continued support, counselling, and aftercare.



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

Competently addressing chemsex is challenging because it is a combination of issues involving substance misuse, sexual health, and mental health.

Chemsex and drug related interventions were adapted to ensure that *high risk behaviours* are addressed, and *treatment goals* relevant to sexual health and mental health are included.

Future plans would include “**thinking outside the box**” and **utilising technology** in order to engage the target population.

ARE YOU USING also known as GHB, GBL, and Liquid E drugs.ie/gbh

It's always safest not to take unknown or illicit drugs at all. G is addictive and it is easy to overdose on it, so if you do decide to take it,

REMEMBER

- Always prepare your own G
- Pre-measure G carefully
- Use as low a dose as possible and wait before re-dosing
- Never swig from the bottle
- Take G orally
- Don't mix G with alcohol or other drugs
- Do mix with water, soft drinks or juice
- Use with people you trust in a safe environment
- Always use condoms if using G. If someone 'goes under'/is unconscious they cannot consent to sex.
- If someone you're with 'goes under'/is unconscious, put them in the recovery position and call 999. Don't assume they will sleep it off.

Need further information and support? Call the HSE Drugs Helpline 1800 459 459, the GMHS Outreach Team 01 669 9553, the National Drug Treatment Centre 01 648 8600 or the Rialto Community Drug Team 01 4540021