



The needs of professionals working on sexualized substance use and its implications for health and social services

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Trajectoires, diversité, substances

Chaire de recherche du Canada TRADIS

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I have no potential conflict of interests to report.

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Background

- Compared to heterosexual and cisgender people, sexual and gender minority people engage in sexualized substance use practices more frequently (1)
- Sexual and gender minority people who engage in sexualized substance use require tailored and culturally sensitive interventions (2)
- Professionals are often ill-prepared to intervene with this population (3)



Presentation objectives

- To identify the needs of professionals working with sexual and gender minority people who engaged in sexualized substance use
- To identify the ways to improve the quality of services and interventions these professionals offer



Methodology

- Research based on Rapid Assessment Process (4)
- 22 semi-structured interviews with managers and counsellors working in organizations targeting sexual and gender minority people in four cities of Québec province (Canada)
- The interviews were conducted in the fall 2021
- A thematic analysis (5) was performed using Nvivo 12 software
- 15% of the material was co-coded and an agreement rate of more than 90% between the co-coders was obtained (5).



Results

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Characteristics of the participants

Managers

- n=7
- Three different cities
- Working in :
 - Public health department
 - Medical clinic
 - Addiction center
 - Sexual health community-based organisation

Counselors

- n=15
- Four different cities
- Working in :
 - Governmental health care network
 - Addiction center
 - Sexual health community-based organisation



How professionals feel about doing interventions with sexual and gender minority people involved in sexualized substance use?

- Participants expressed a lack of confidence when discussing with sexual and gender minority people
- They also expressed fear in using terms that may be offensive

“One solution to make the centers more welcoming for LGBTQ+ people would be to be more inclusive in terms of pronouns and access to adapted bathrooms” (Julie, counsellor, governmental health care network)



Need for training

- Participants shared a need for training on various topics such as:
 - The experiences of oppression and its effects on sexual and gender minority people
 - Sexualized substances practices among that population

“There is no knowledge or specifically trained workers on this. It also requires a change in the education system. There needs to be a twinning between the clinical and the academic research: the two do not talk to each other and there is also a reluctance to change, especially at the governmental level” (Sophie, manager, addiction center)



How to reach sexual and gender minority people involved in sexualized substance use?

- Participants identified the need to appropriately accommodate people involved in sexualized substance use, such as:
 - Having respite beds
 - Providing outreach services

“It is difficult to reach this population because sexuality is still taboo. It is also a rather closed environment” (Grégoire, manager, community-based organization)



Harm reduction services

- Participants stressed the importance of having sexualized substance use supplies and equipment in addiction services, sexual health services, and LGBTQIA2S+ services. This includes :
 - Pipes for smoking methamphetamine
 - Needle-less syringes for anal injection
 - Drug checking services

“Substance use equipment, drug checking services, connection with other services” (Yves, manager, community-based organization)



The key role of peers

- Participants emphasized the importance of involving peer support workers into their teams as an impactful strategy to provide optimal care to sexual and gender minority people and to facilitate the linkage to care when needed.

“Go through peer helpers. Be able to provide a positive experience and then link them to screening services. Ensure that we are known as an inclusive environment” (Patrice, counselor, community-based organisation)



How to promote the development of services ?

- Some participants felt it was important that substance use issues among sexual and gender minorities be better recognized by health authorities so that there is budget for service development.

“In the context where LGBT and chemsex issues are not a priority for government institutions, there is political lobbying to be done to have these issues recognized” (Geneviève, manager, health clinic)



Discussion

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Access to training is a key solution

- Training on sexualized substance use and on sexual and gender diversity are not always easily accessible to those working amongst them
 - Lack of appropriate training
 - Lack of trainers
 - Paid training



The role of public policies

- Public health policies should consider :
 - The need for substance use organizations to involve peers as staff members
 - To support the set-up of drug checking services



In conclusion

- You have seen this morning that sexualized substance use is a complex phenomenon
- Therefore, meeting the needs of people who engage in sexualized substance use is also complex
- In Quebec, as elsewhere in the world, community organizations and people with lived experience are mobilizing to offer support to those who need it
- But this response must be stronger and more sustainable, and this can only be done through structural solutions that involve people with lived experience in the development of public policies and interventions.



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Acknowledgements

Founders:

Project : Health Canada / Ministère de la Santé
et des Services sociaux

TRADIS research chair : SSHRC

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Mathieu Goyette

Olivier Ferlatte

David Laforune

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Amélie Couvrette

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Ida Giugantico

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Joseph De Piano

Guillaume Tardif

Participants

The 22 professionals and the 64 sexual and gender minority people

Partners:

RÉZO, Clinique médicale L'Actuel, AIDQ, Portage, IUD, ASSTeQ,
BRAS-Outaouais, MIELS-Québec