

# The Intersection of Sex and Substance Use among MSM: A Prevention Opportunity

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## Background

- 8.6% increase in number of HIV/AIDS cases by year of diagnosis in the U.S. among MSM from 2001 to 2006 (CDC, 2008); a possible re-emergence of the epidemic (Jaffe et al., 2007).
- Substance use before sex is an independent risk factor for HIV infection (Koblin et al., 2006).
- "An urgent need to focus research on heavy drug and alcohol users who engage in unsafe sex..." (Ostrow, 2000).

## Research Objective

- Use a grounded theory approach to better understand the dynamics of sex while high among a sample of MSM in Miami:
  - What substances are used and why?
  - Are there reasons for use that are related to higher risk situations?
  - Are some substances used in riskier situations?



- 112 substance-using MSM enrolled in a novel, three-session, small group discussion, HIV risk reduction intervention trial in Miami, Florida.
- Analysis of brief, semi-structured interviews with 88 men about their most recent sexual encounter with a casual partner while high on alcohol or drugs in past 3 months.

## Demographics

Age Range	n	%		n	%
Median age = 39			Black / African Am	28	32%
18-24	7	8%	White / Caucasian	23	26%
25-34	20	23%	Hispanic / Latino	36	41%
35-44	38	43%	Pacific Islander	1	1%
45-55	23	26%	Total:	88	100%

- 36% (n=32) known HIV+
- 24% (n=21) traded sex for drugs or money within the year prior to baseline interview
- 26% (n=23) considered themselves to be homeless within the year prior to baseline interview
- Trading sex was significantly related to homelessness (p=.004)

## Findings

### Non-sex seeking substance use

- 48% of respondents used substances to relax, to get high, or to relieve negative feelings; sex was unplanned.
  - "The purpose is to get out of the depression. It's not about sex."* –28 y/o Hispanic
  - "Well I started drinking [at the bar] because I wanted to forget about the problems with the ex. And then, I figured, okay, I'm drunk, I feel like having sex, so, the guy was there, that was that."* –25 y/o Hispanic
  - "Well, I have to say, if I had not been drinking I would definitely not go home with this guy."* –35 y/o Hispanic

### Sex seeking substance use

- 34% of the sample used substances to increase pleasure during a planned sexual experience.
  - "It's a better sensation and I can hold an erection a little bit longer when I smoke marijuana."* –41y/o African American
- 15% reported using drugs and alcohol to reduce inhibitions, to increase confidence while pursuing sex, or to ameliorate fear of rejection. The sexual encounter is anticipated but not always guaranteed.
  - "If I drink I'm more open to being promiscuous or to having less inhibitions when it comes to sex. Once I have a few drinks I'm more lenient and more flexible and more willing to do things that are more irresponsible and can lead to dangerous situations."* –28 y/o Hispanic
- 3% (n= 3) used substances during the encounter because a particular partner wanted to use. The possibility of sex with this partner depended on the respondent using drugs as well.
  - "But if the individual gotta have [drugs] to put them in the mood or play the games, then, to play the games you got to participate. So then I do that just to participate in the game. Or you not gonna get anything."* –42 y/o African American

## Results

- Unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) was reported by 39% of respondents (n=34).
- 75% of meth users engaged in UAI vs. 33% who did not use meth (p=.009).
- 50% of sex seekers engaged in UAI vs. 26% of non-sex seekers (p=.029).
- Of 12 men who used meth during the encounter, 83% (n=10) used while seeking sex (p=.028): 7 as an aphrodisiac, 2 for disinhibition and 1 because a partner requested that it be used.
- UAI was not predicted by race, age, HIV status, trading sex, homelessness, or sub-set reason for using a substance during the encounter.

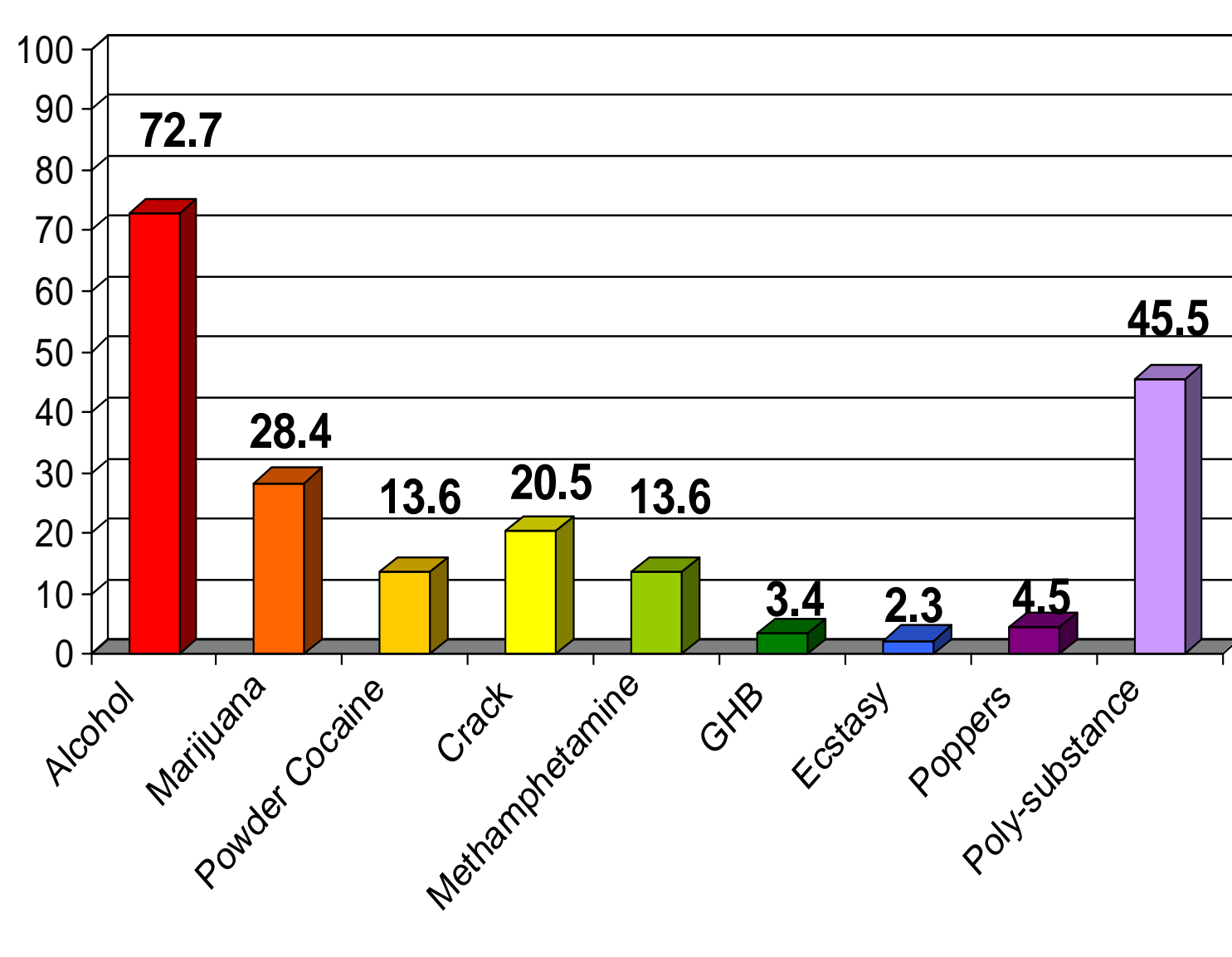
## Conclusions

- In this sample of men who had sex with a casual partner while high:
- Sex seekers were more likely to engage in UAI than non-seekers.
  - Methamphetamine use was highly associated with sex-seeking behavior
  - Methamphetamine use significantly predicted UAI.

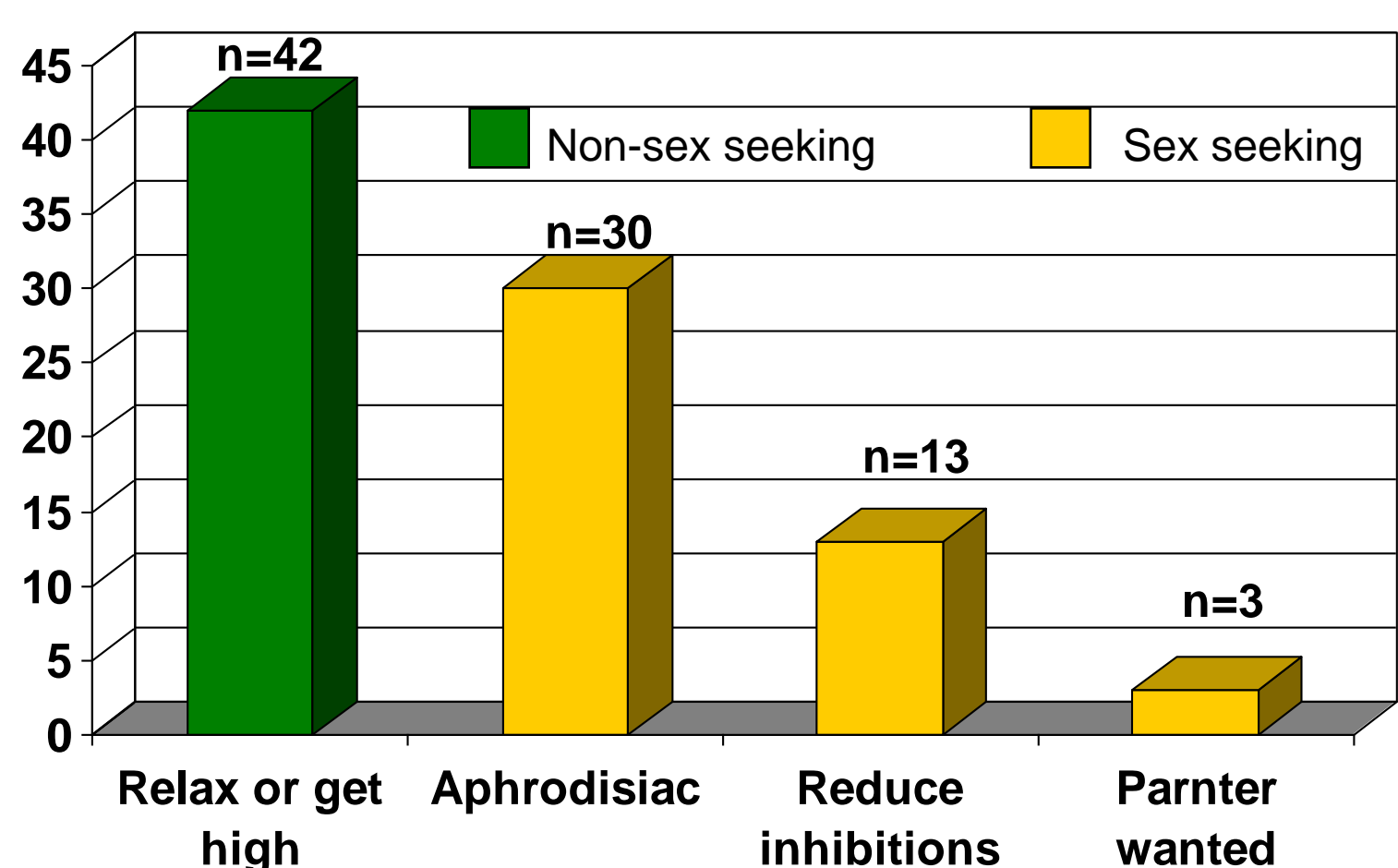
## Recommendations

- HIV prevention programs for MSM should take into account:
- The different motivations MSM have for using substances
  - The different sexual scenarios men encounter; in situations when they are seeking sex, they may be more likely to take sexual risks.
  - That high risk UAI is associated with methamphetamine use

% Reporting each substance used during sexual encounter



Stated reasons for substance use at time of encounter



Number reporting using each substance by sex seeking behavior

