

# Sexualised drug use among transgender women in the TransCITAR cohort in Argentina

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## BACKGROUND

**Sexualised drug use (SDU)**, including chemsex, is a public health concern as it **increases the risk of HIV acquisition and mental health problems**.

It has been widely studied among men who have sex with men; however, **information is scarce among transgender women (TGW)**.

This work aimed to estimate the **prevalence of SDU and its associated factors in TGW** participating in TransCITAR cohort study in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



TransCITAR is a **prospective cohort study** that follows the physical and psychosocial health of **500 transgender and non-binary people** over a five-year period in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

## METHODS

Participants were enrolled between September 2019 to December 2022 and assisted by a team of peer navigators.



Interviewer-administered questionnaires gathered data on:

- Sociodemographic variables
- Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D): significant depressive symptoms (cutoff  $\geq 16$ ).
- Screening of suicide ideation, last week.
- Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT): hazardous drinking (cutoff  $\geq 8$ )
- Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10): possible dependence (cutoff  $\geq 6$ )
- Sexual behaviour (ad hoc)

**Sexualised Drug Use: having used any illicit drug (cocaine, crack, ecstasy or other amphetamines, ketamine, meth, and poppers) before/during sex in the last month.**

### Data analysis

Chi-square tests, odds ratios (OR) and confidence intervals (CI) for categorical variables and independent sample *t*-tests for continuous variables were run to explore associations with SDU.

## CONCLUSIONS

- **SDU among TGW is substantial. However, unlike other key populations, it seems to be more associated to sex work in a context of psychosocial vulnerability than to recreational purposes.**
- **More studies are required to better understand this phenomenon of SDU among TGW from Latin America, to explore reasons and implications and compare patterns of behaviour with other populations and regions of the world.**

## RESULTS

### Sociodemographic characteristics

**421 TGW**  
Median age 31 years  
(IQR: 26-38)

- 31.4% foreign-born
- 41.4% unstable housing
- 50.2% incomplete high school
- 54.3% current sex work

### Sexualised drug use (SDU)

**43.9%**  
SDU  
LAST MONTH

- 29.7% COCAINE
- 5.7% ECSTASY
- 2.1% CRACK
- 1.9% KETAMINE
- 1.4% AMPHETAMINES
- 0.2% POPPERS

46.1% use Cannabis  
3.1% Psychotropic drugs



**42.8%**  
Baseline HIV  
prevalence



**39.1%**  
Condomless anal sex  
at least once in the last month

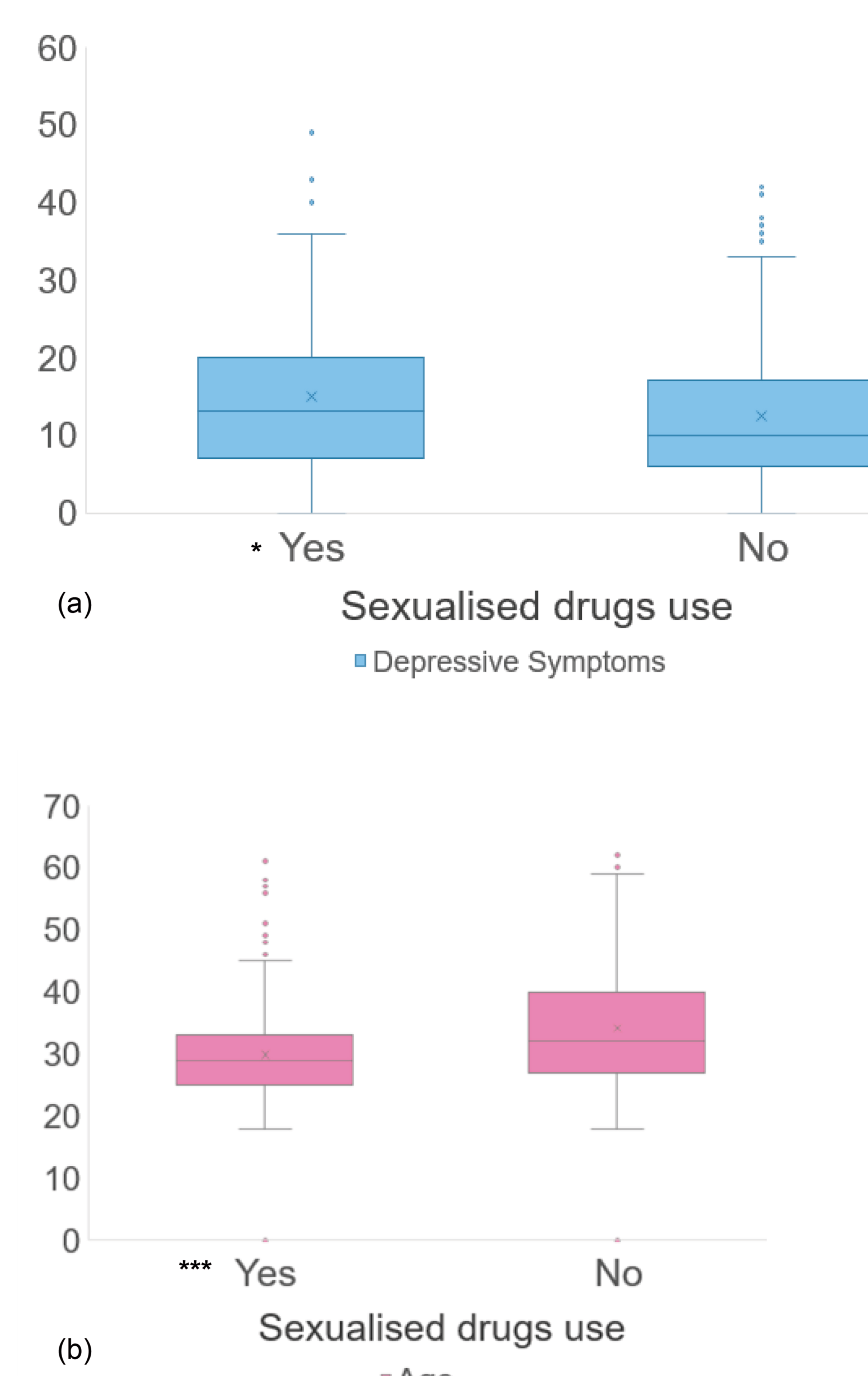
Table 1. Baseline factors associated with sexualised drug use in the last month in transgender women from TransCITAR cohort

	Total n = 421 % (n)	Sexualised Drug Use		p-value	OR(95% CI)
		Yes n = 185 % (n)	No n = 236 % (n)		
<b>Sociodemographics</b>					
External migration	31.4 (132)	27.0 (50)	34.7 (82)	0.090	0.811 (0.631-1.042)
Internal migration	67.8 (196)	78.5 (106)	58.4 (90)	<b>0.000</b>	0.577 (0.415-0.801)
Incomplete high school or lower	50.2 (211)	54.3 (100)	47.0 (111)	0.137	1.179(0.948-1.467)
Unstable housing	41.4 (174)	48.9 (90)	35.6 (84)	<b>0.006</b>	<b>1.354 (1.093-1.677)</b>
Social and income assistance	45.3 (190)	47.0 (86)	44.1 (104)	0.551	1.069 (0.860-1.328)
Current sex work	54.3 (228)	74.5 (137)	38.6 (91)	<b>0.000</b>	<b>2.455 (1.874-3.216)</b>
Public healthcare	90.7 (380)	93.5 (173)	88.5 (207)	0.077	0.676 (0.417-1.096)
<b>Mental health and substance use</b>					
Self-injury, lifetime	25.7 (108)	29.2 (54)	22.9 (54)	.141	0.837 (0.665-1.053)
Suicide attempts, lifetime	25.4 (107)	30.3 (56)	21.6 (51)	<b>.043</b>	0.785 (0.627-0.982)
Tobacco smoking (current)	41.8 (176)	48.1 (89)	36.9 (87)	<b>.020</b>	0.775 (0.626-0.959)
Hazardous drinking	23.5 (81)	32.5 (53)	15.4 (28)	<b>.000</b>	0.637 (0.515-0.788)
Illicit drug abuse	4.4 (12)	7.4 (11)	0.8 (1)	<b>0.008</b>	0.575 (0.468-0.706)
Condomless anal sex	39.1 (117)	46.2 (67)	32.5 (50)	<b>0.015</b>	<b>1.336 (1.062-1.681)</b>
<b>Clinical characteristics</b>					
STI global	57.7 (243)	62.2 (115)	54.2 (128)	0.102	0.831 (0.663-1.041)
VDRL reactive	43.0 (181)	43.2 (80)	42.8 (101)	0.578	-----
HIV diagnosis	42.8 (180)	47.0 (87)	39.4 (93)	0.117	1.189 (0.959-1.473)

### Mental health problems

- 23.5% showed hazardous drinking
- 4.4% drug dependence
- 32.1% significant depressive symptoms (last week)
- 25.4% suicide attempt (lifetime)

Figure 1. Box plots of the outcome of the Mann-Whitney U test for comparison of depressive symptoms (a) and age (b) among groups.



Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### SDU was independently associated with:

- Unstable housing
- Current sex work
- Condomless anal sex
- Physical violence
- Depressive symptoms
- Age