

Sexualized drug use among transgender women with HIV from Argentina: The mediating role of psychological distress in the relation with multiple stigmas and sexual violence

WEPED101

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BACKGROUND

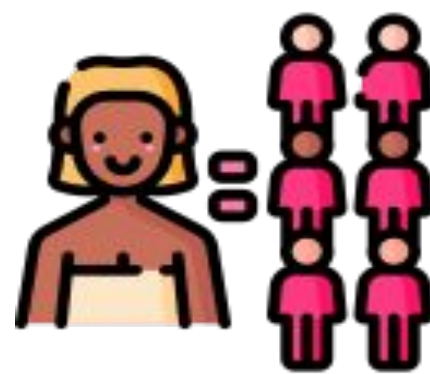
- High prevalence of sexualized drug use (SDU, i.e., substance use before or during sex) among transgender women (TGW)
- SDU may be fueled by the co-occurrence of multiple indicators, including diverse forms of stigma, violence and negative mental health outcomes.
- The mechanisms through which these indicators interact remain unclear.

OBJECTIVE

Examine the role of psychological distress in the relation between transgender and HIV-related stigmas, sexual violence, and SDU in TGW with HIV from Buenos Aires, Argentina, using a mediation analysis.

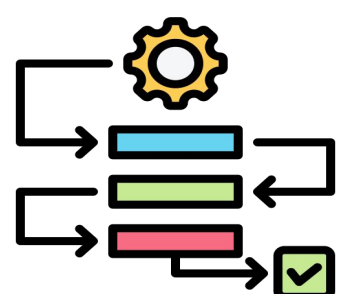
METHODS

Participants



175 TGW with HIV participating in **TransCITAR**, a prospective cohort study of 500 transgender and nonbinary individuals.

Procedures and Data analysis



- This study analyzed baseline data, collected between September/2019 and December/2022.
- A generalized linear model (GLM) mediation was employed.

Measures



- **SDU (dependent variable):** use of one or more of 8 illicit substances* (excluding cannabis) before or during sex in the last year.
- **Transgender stigma (independent variable):** Transgender Stigma Brief Scale total score.
- **HIV-related stigma (independent variable):** Berger's Scale total score.
- **Sexual violence (independent variable):** at least one sexual violence episode in their lifetime from family members, sex work clients, police officers and/or partners).
- **Psychological distress (mediator):** Symptoms CheckList 27 items' total score.

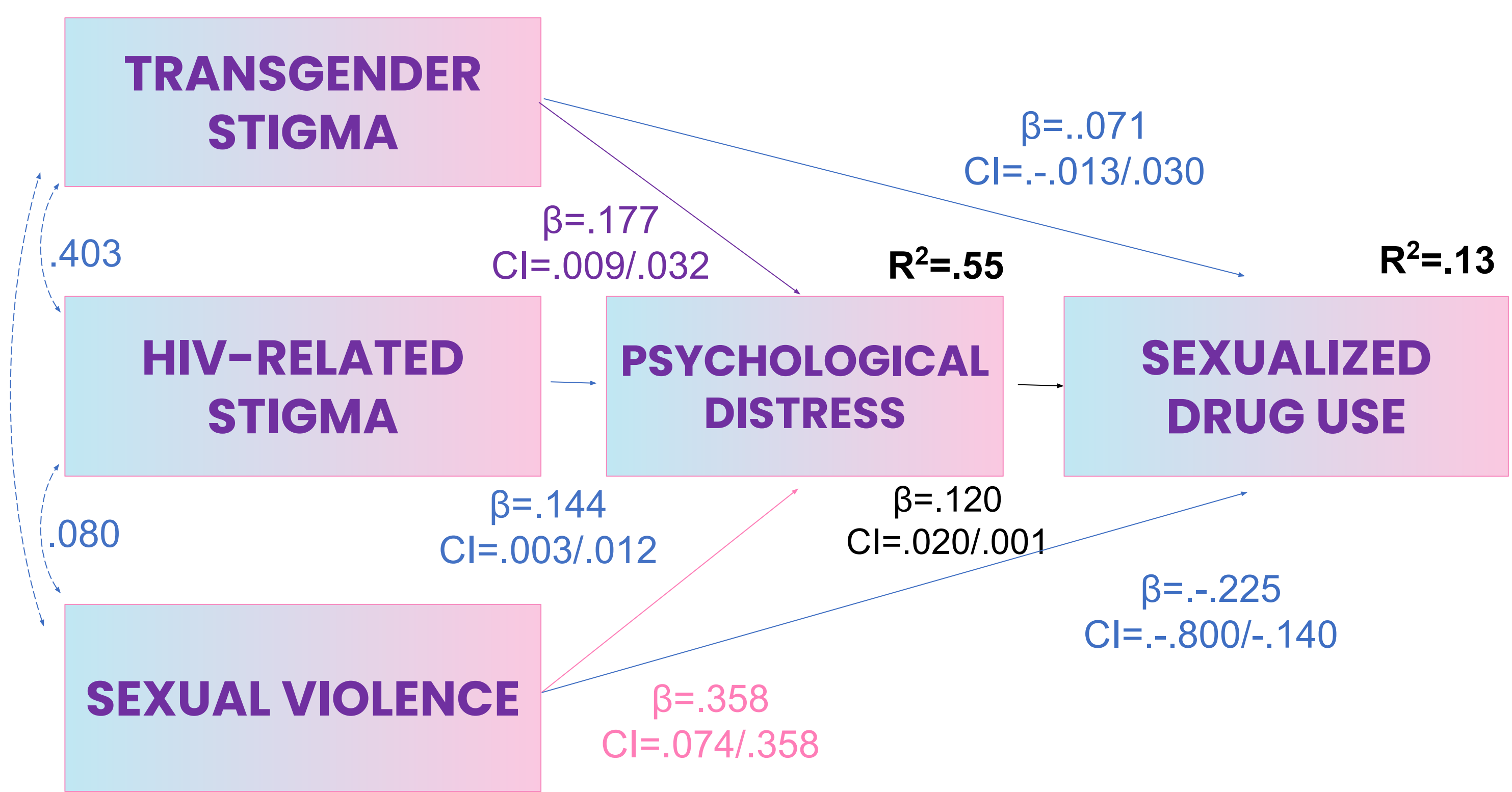
Stigma and sexual violence increase psychological distress, which in turn, increases the odds of **sexualized drug use** in TGW.

Mental health plays a key role in the relation between stigma, violence and behaviors that increase exposure to HIV and STIs.

Trans
CITAR

RESULTS

- The mediation model pathways were statistically significant: psychological distress mediated the relation between HIV-related stigma ($\beta=0.144$, $CI=0.003/0.012$, $p<.001$), transgender stigma ($\beta=0.177$, $CI=0.009/0.032$, $p<.001$), and sexual violence ($\beta=0.358$, $CI=0.074/0.358$, $p=.003$) with SDU.
- Higher levels of both stigmas and report of sexual violence were associated with higher psychological distress, which in turn was associated with increased SDU.



PARTICIPANTS' CHARACTERISTICS



38.3% migrants (foreign-born).
81.5% internal migrants.



62.9% incomplete secondary education.



60.6% engaged in sex work.



42.9% engaged in SDU in the last year. The most frequent:

- ➔ **66.7%** cocaine.
- ➔ **9.1%** ecstasy.



21.1% at least one episode of lifetime sexual violence, primarily from

- ➔ sex work clients (**29.5%**).
- ➔ police (**29.5%**).

CONCLUSIONS

- Mental health has a critical role in the relation between stigma, violence and SDU in TGW.
- Stigma and violence continue to be the primary drivers of adverse mental and sexual health outcomes in this population.
- Mental health interventions may contribute to a reduction in sexual risk behaviors (such as SDU) by reducing psychological distress caused by stigma and violence.
- Interventions from a trauma-informed, intersectional approach may be more efficient towards such goal.
- Other factors (e.g., gender affirmation) may also play a significant role by reducing stigma and psychological distress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

We deeply thank all participants of TransCITAR, who made this study possible.

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*Cocaine, ecstasy, crack, amphetamines, heroine, cocaine paste, unprescribed psychiatric medication, ketamine.