

Prevalence and correlates of substance use among trans*female youth ages 16-24 years in the San Francisco Bay Area

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Abstract:

Background: Substance use is highly prevalent among transgender females and has been associated with negative health outcomes, including HIV infection. Little is known about psychosocial risk factors that may influence the onset of substance use among trans*female youth, which can contribute to health disparities during adulthood.

Methods: We conducted a secondary data analysis of a study on HIV risk and resilience among trans*female youth (N=292). Prevalence of substance use was assessed and multivariable logistic regression models were used to examine the relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychological distress, gender-related discrimination, parental drug or alcohol problems (PDAP) and multiple substance use outcomes.

Results: Most (69%) of the trans*female youth reported recent drug use. In multivariable analyses, those with PTSD had increased odds of drug use [AOR=1.94 (95%CI=1.09-3.44)]. Those who experienced gender-related discrimination had increased odds of drug use [AOR=2.28 (95%CI=1.17-4.44)], drug use concurrent with sex [AOR=2.35 (95%CI=1.11-4.98)] and use of multiple drugs [AOR=3.24 (95%CI=1.52-6.88)]. Those with psychological distress had increased odds of using multiple heavy drugs [AOR=2.27 (95%CI=1.01-5.12)]. Those with PDAP had increased odds of drugs use [AOR=2.62 (95%CI=1.43-4.82)], drug use concurrent with sex [AOR=2.01 (95%CI, 1.15-3.51)] and use of multiple drugs [AOR=2.10 (95%CI=1.22-3.62)].

Conclusions: Substance use is highly prevalent among trans*female youth and was significantly associated with psychosocial risk factors. In order to effectively address substance use among trans*female youth, efforts must address coping related to gender-based discrimination and trauma. Furthermore, structural level interventions aiming to reduce stigma and gender-identity discrimination might also be effective.