



# Exploratory survey on chemsex in the context of prostitution /sex work among MSM & Trans\* people in Brussels Capital and beyond.



## Presentation of Alias

Since 2009, the non-profit organisation Alias has been working with MSM (men who have sex with men) and trans\* people active in prostitution/sex work in the Brussels-Capital Region. Alias develops strategies for health promotion, prevention/risk reduction and social inclusion through several participatory projects and the provision of psychosocial and medical services: street work (outreach) in the city and internet procontacts on escort websites, healthcare services (STI/HIV testing, vaccinations, PrEP), reception services, collective and community activities, individual follow-up. Alias' offer is completely anonymous and free of charge. Our objective is to meet the needs and accompany the requests of the public. We also offer an expertise on MSM and trans\* prostitution to our partners.

**More information :** [www.alias.brussels](http://www.alias.brussels)  
**Contact us :** [contact@alias.brussels](mailto:contact@alias.brussels)

## Presentation and objectives of the survey

The survey was conducted in 2019 among chemsexers -sex workers in order to improve the Alias team's knowledge of the realities and issues of chemsex among MSM and trans\* sex workers in Brussels and to offer them better advise and services. Focus was put on :

- Products and consumption patterns
- Practice frequency
- Forms of payment
- Implications for the lives of sex workers
- Sexworkers' needs related to chemsex

Results were also used to develop the website [www.chemsex.be](http://www.chemsex.be). It enabled Alias to develop a completely new and original section dedicated to chemsex related to prostitution/sex work: <https://chemsex.be/sexe-sous-chems/travail-du-sexe/> (French only).

## Definitions

- Choice was made to use a **broad definition** of chemsex that includes both legal and illegal psychoactive products that have been in circulation for a long time or have appeared more recently.

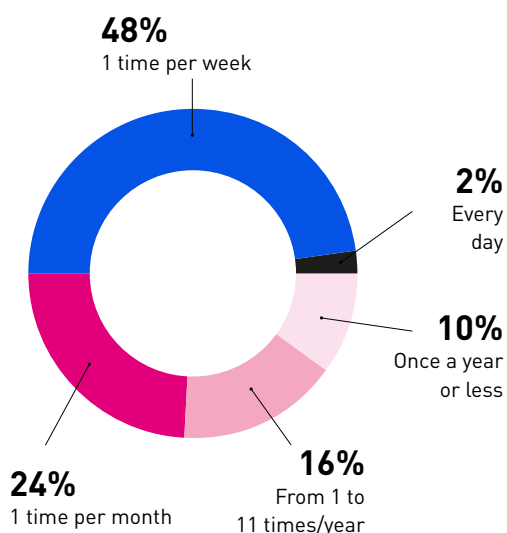
**“Chemsex is taking psychoactive products or drugs, whether legal (e.g. alcohol, medication, viagra) or not (heroin, Crystal Meth/Tina, speed / amphetamines, cocaine, GBL/GHB) for sexual purposes.”**

- Slam or slamming refers to “the practice of injecting a substance in a sexual context”. The term has appeared alongside chemsex. Slamming is practiced most of the time in order to have long sessions of chemsex over several days or an entire weekend. The products used to be very powerful and having even more powerful effects by this mode of consumption.
- Sex work/prostitution: at Alias, we use both terms together to reflect the diversity of social realities of the activity, however, sometimes only one term is used in the report and the report summary for ease of reading.

## How often do sex workers practice chemsex?

2% report that they practice chemsex every day, **48% once a week**, **24% once a month on average**, 16% from 1 to 11 times a year and 10% once a year or more rarely.

Frequency of chemsex among respondents (N=50)



## Methodology

- Questionnaire in 4 languages (French, Dutch, English, Spanish).
- Distribution during 9 months via the escorting websites invested by Alias, among the Alias targeted public, through social networks (specific Facebook groups) and Alias partners (notably the Belgian Network Male and Transgender Prostitution), and also mailing lists of the national, European and international organizations dedicated to sex workers.
- Online dissemination beyond Belgium and targeting of escort profiles who have made visible the fact that they plan to come and work in Brussels.

## Sample

**118 people** proactively contacted online.

**52 respondents** aged 18 to 60 years (average 34 years).

## Limits

- Small sample (52 respondents).
- Declarative data on practices related to partly illegal products.
- People who engage in chemsex for money, drugs or other goods and services but who do not define themselves as sex workers/escorts were unlikely to feel concerned by the survey and may be under-represented.

## Where is chemsex practiced in prostitution / sex work?

72.1% of the respondents have done chemsex in Belgium during the last year.

Chemsexers-sex workers go mobile to follow clients in the festive gay scene in Europe and around the world.

**Several types of spaces where chemsex is practiced:** metropolises and large European cities, private sphere (apartment, hotel, at home or at the client's home), cruising places (sauna, clubs, parks, street), travel, party or holiday destinations.

# Practicing chemsex between choice and constraint

A quarter of people (26.5%) would practice chemsex only at the client's request, a third by desire (30.6%) and a small half because their desire to practice chemsex is similar to that of the clients (42.9%).



## Products consumed

- **By sex workers:** 60.8% sexual stimulants (Kamagra®, Viagra®, Cyalis®), 56.9% Alcohol - Poppers - Cocaine, 47.1% GHB/GBL, 45.1% Cannabis - Ecstasy, 41.2% Crystal meth - Tina, 27.5% MDMA, 23.5% Ketamine, 19.6% mephedrone, 15.7% medication (other than sexual stimulants), 13.7% mushrooms, 11.8% LSD - methadone, 9.8% heroin, 3.9% 3MMC, 2% CBD oil.

- **Comparison with products consumed by clients according to sex workers:** sexual stimulants arrive in 3<sup>rd</sup> position (59.2%) behind cocaine (73.5%), alcohol and poppers (67.3%). The reported use of Tina is strong in the responses: 41.2% of respondents say they use it and 59.2% say that the clients use it. GHB/GBL is in 3<sup>rd</sup> position among the products most used by sex workers and in 4<sup>th</sup> position among clients according to sex workers. Among the more common products, the use of cannabis, ecstasy, poppers, cocaine, alcohol and speed are often mentioned by both clients and sex workers.

## Consumption patterns

82% sniff, 66% smoked, 48% swallowed, 22% injection/slam, 4% anal plug.

**Focus on Slamming:** 24 respondents out of 52 answered questions about slam (46.15%). Among them: 25% of sex workers say they inject the client; 75% say they do not inject clients; 29.2% report injecting themselves; 20.8% declare getting injected by the client.

## A specific and diversified terminology

**Three groups of words to describe chemsex practices:**

- Chems, plans chemsex, chemsex, sessionchemx, planant planant, chemsfriendly (most commonly used in French-speaking countries).
- Party & play, PnP, White party (more Anglo-Saxon name).
- Slam (refers to intravenous injection into the chemsex).

Desire to stand out from the figure of the “drug addict” even if the products and practices are sometimes the same. Sex under drugs then becomes chems, Party & Play (PnP) or chemsex, the practice of injecting in a sexual context becomes slam.

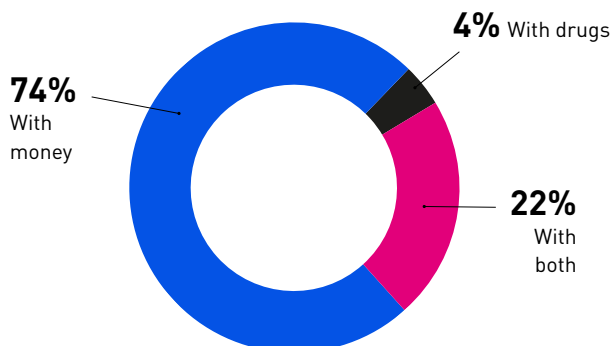
Several names for the same product, some manage to tell clients about it without necessarily naming the practice.

Increasing appearance of “No chems” escort profiles following the Anglo-Saxon “sober sex”<sup>3</sup> movement that appeared in 2019 among escorts/sex workers.



## Sex work, chemsex and forms of payment

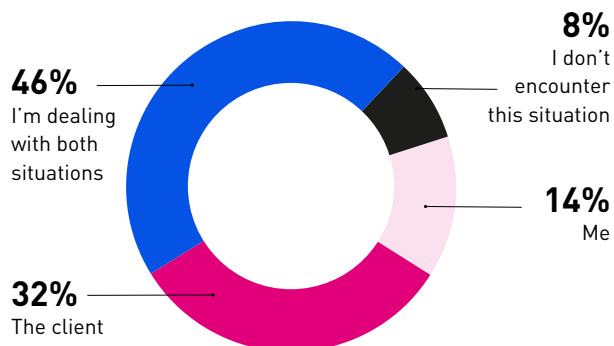
Payment for sex work related to chemsex (N=50)



The dominant standard of payment for sex work in relation to chemsex is payment in money, but payment with psychoactive products is not marginal. 20% of respondents report that they have had at least one sexual exchange for the purpose of obtaining products.

## Who supplies the products?

Drugs suppliers (N=50)



Whoever supplies the products can be as much the sex worker as the client. These acts expose people to the law, which de facto considers them to be resellers.

## Information needs

- How to manage customers before, during and after the sexual transaction (setting limits and knowing how to apply them)?
- Factual and non-judgmental information; and quality product control (risk reduction and product testing services).
- How to manage consumption? Management after drug use (craving, descent, withdrawal).
- Help to regain sexual pleasure without drugs (decreased libido, erectile dysfunction)?
- Training and knowledge on harm reduction (e.g. injecting drugs)?
- Legal information (drugs supply, consumption).

Alias' answers and advice to these requests for information from sex workers can be found on the website [www.chemsex.be](http://www.chemsex.be) under the heading "sex work".

## Prospects

Following this survey, the Alias team has new elements to optimize its interventions and its tools of advice and orientation for its public related to chemsex.

This effort will have to be continued in the future, all the more so as products, consumption patterns, terminology, codes and responses in terms of risk reduction and support for people wishing to slow down or stop are constantly evolving.

<sup>1</sup> The illustrations are taken from the [www.chemsex.be](http://www.chemsex.be) website run by the Observatoire du sida et des sexualités and Ex-Aequo. Illustrations ©Burt.

<sup>2</sup> The situation in Bruxelles in this survey : Van Acker, 2017, <http://observatoire-si-dasexualites.be/wp-content/uploads/WEB-DEF-chemsex-rapport-mars17.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://hornet.com/stories/sober-sex-workers> and <https://tetu.com/2019/01/11/en-angleterre-les-travailleurs-du-sexe-gays-luttent-contre-le-chemsex-avec-le-sober-sex>