

COUNTERING A HIDDEN RISK: Initiating Change Among Meth-Using MSM

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

We are targeting methamphetamine-using MSM using a brief harm minimization intervention delivered by CBO staff, based upon motivational interviewing techniques and conceptually framed within the Transtheoretical Stages of Change model. This intervention builds upon existing outreach efforts at this agency (Tri-City Health Center in Fremont), as well as partnerships developed with other referring agencies/organizations (including several in Oakland). Our intervention and study design were shaped by formative research: ethnographic mapping and field observations of venues, in-depth interviews of men in the targeted population, interviews with community stakeholders, and interviews with community service providers, including a mix of HIV-focused and substance abuse treatment programs.

The intervention involves 4 individual sessions with participants at the offices of the CBO research collaborator or at offices of other service providers with whom Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) have been created. In these sessions, motivational interviewing is used to define a goal within the first two meetings, and movement towards that goal is the focus of subsequent sessions. Our intent is to test the feasibility and effectiveness of delivering such an intervention within comparable settings with front-line staff. Given the demographic breakdown of Alameda County, the staff has been working hard to recruit a sample that has a high proportion of men who have sex with men (MSM) of color, and we therefore hope to provide more information into patterns of methamphetamine use within different subgroups in the county.

SIGNIFICANCE

The acknowledgment of -- and resources directed toward -- this public health problem among MSM in San Francisco and Los Angeles has overshadowed the problem that exists adjacent to, but outside of those counties. Alameda County lacks any gay neighborhoods or communal settings for MSM, other than a few bars thinly scattered throughout the county. The lack of public, non-bar MSM venues promotes reliance on an underground "scene" and use of Internet contacts to meet men -- overlapping with the loose network of MSM who use methamphetamine as a means of "hooking up" for socializing and sex. Socially conservative areas of the county (combined with heavy police surveillance in key rural and suburban areas) have contributed to maintaining a clandestine but extensive underground network of cruising spots, public sex environments and sex clubs. The challenges in countering the MSM-methamphetamine "scene" in Alameda County are reflective of the difficulties in carrying out such targeted prevention programs in areas outside of those major urban areas that support a gay-identified core neighborhood with community institutions and services focused on the LGBT population's needs.

INTERESTING FINDINGS

Our formative research highlighted not only the variety of networks of methamphetamine-using MSM and "meth scenes" in the County, but the lack of detailed information on methamphetamine issues among service providers, and the dearth of methamphetamine-specific and gay-specific treatment services available to them. Despite the general perception of methamphetamine as a white gay men's drug, there was a recognition that MSM of color were also using it -- although there was more secrecy about its use among these men, and strategies might be employed to ensure that such drug use remained partitioned away from the rest of their lives. The ways in which men may create distinct demarcations between those aspects of themselves that are deemed private vs. to be shared with others may have parallels to the ways in which they organize their sexuality. Interested parties can contact the Principal Investigator for the report based upon the formative research conducted in Alameda County (jay.paul@ucsf.edu).

PROJECT RECRUITMENT DATES: Currently recruiting.

PROJECT WEBSITE: www.camptina.org

PROJECT END DATE: June 2008