

EXCHANGE SEX AND SUBSTANCE USE WITHIN A SAMPLE OF HOMELESS YOUTH IN LOS ANGELES

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Presenter Disclosures

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The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

What is “exchange sex”?

- Exchanging sex for money, gifts, food, shelter, clothes or drugs
- Also known as “transactional sex” or “survival sex”
- Practiced by 20-30% of homeless youth (Beech, 2003; Marshall et al., 2010) VS. 2-3% of housed youth (Homma, Nickolson, & Saewyc, 2012)
- Steadily increases with the amount of time youth spend homeless (Gwadz, 2009; Chen et al., 2004)
- Prospective research found an 11% incidence rate of homeless youth initiating exchange sex over a median of 2.4 years of being homeless (Weber et al., 2004)

Who are homeless youth?

- This study includes:
 - *runaways* (i.e., youth who have spent more than one night away from home without parental permission)
 - *throwaways* (i.e., youth who have been forced to leave home by their parents)
 - *street youths* (i.e., youth who live in high risk non-traditional locations such as under bridges and in abandoned buildings)
 - *systems youth* (i.e., youth who have previously been involved in government systems such as foster care or juvenile justice) (Moore, 2005)

Homeless Youth

- In the US, 1.5 - 2 million homeless youth each year are living on the streets, in shelters, or in other temporary accommodations (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006; Rew et al., 2003).
- Compared to normative populations of youth, homeless youth are more likely to report:
 - mental health diagnoses
 - experiences of trauma (abuse, death of parent, etc.)
 - high rates of substance use
 - irregular sleeping habits
 - poor dietary practices
 - chronic exposure to the elements (see review by Edidin, et al., 2012).

Homelessness and Sexual Risk

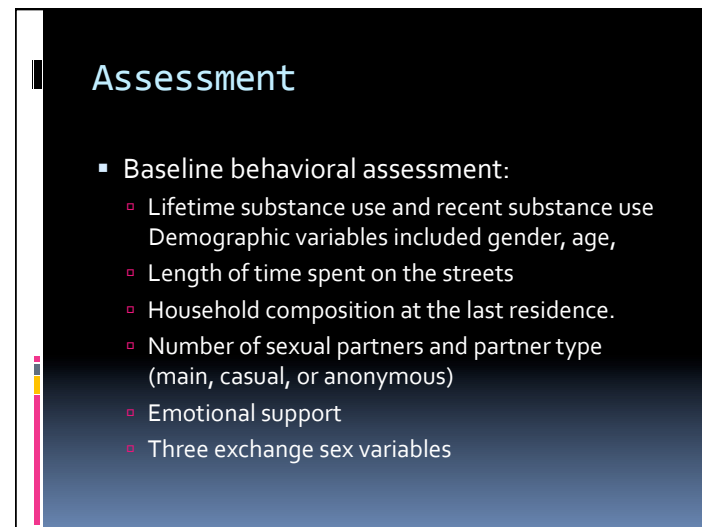
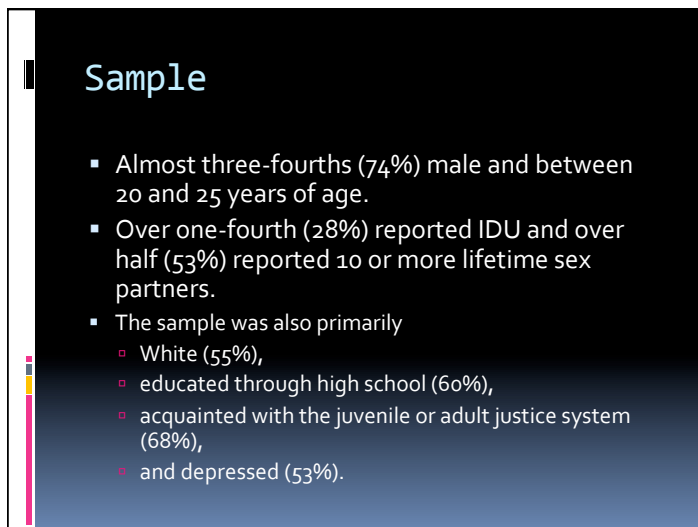
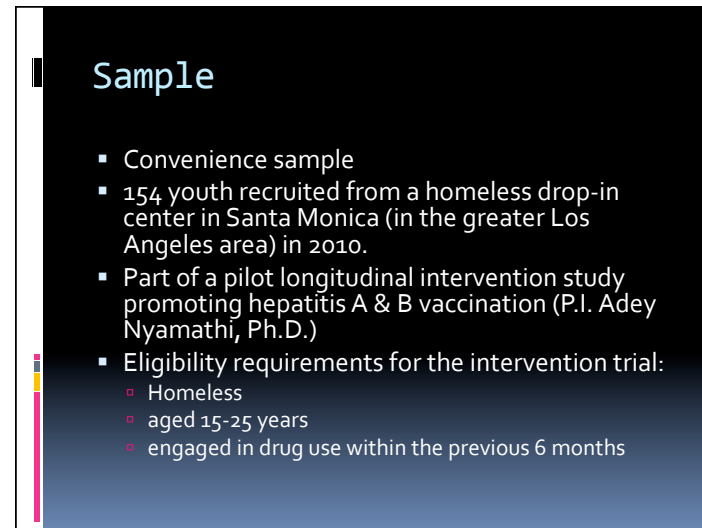
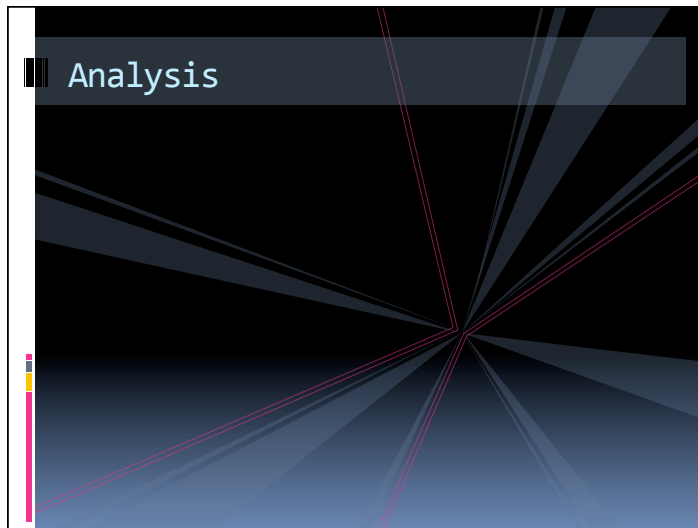
- Shared causal factors for homelessness and risky sexual behavior among adolescents include trauma and substance abuse.
- Homeless youth report high rates of risky sexual practices such as early sexual debut, having multiple partners, and inconsistent condom use (Edidin et al., 2012; Heerde et al., 2015).
- Homeless youth experience high rates of HIV (2 to 10 times the risk of other adolescents in the United States) (Young & Rice, 2011), and STIs (ranging from 11% among males to 63% among females) (Edidin et al., 2012).

Risks Associated with Exchange Sex

- Infectious disease (HIV, Hepatitis C, STIs) (Edwards, Iritani, & Halfors, 2006; Jenness, et al., 2011; Shannon et al., 2010)
- Exposure to sexual victimization and other violence (Heerde & Hemphill, 2015)
- Arrest and criminal prosecution (Goldenberg et al., 2014; Jenness, et al., 2011)
- Facilitates substance use (Rhodes, Singer, & Bourgois, 2006)
 - relying on a partner for drugs
 - requiring assistance with injecting
 - being second on the needle (Miller et al., 2011)

The role of substance use

- Facilitates sexual risk
 - More frequent and riskier sex associated with substance use and dependence (Meyer et al., 2011; King et al., 2012), especially stimulant use (Shoptaw et al., 2013)
 - Less consistent condom use
 - Riskier injection practices
 - More likely to accept offers of more money for sex without a condom (Deering et al., 2013), possibly to avoid symptoms of drug or alcohol dependence (Rekart, 2005)
 - Exchange partners are more likely to offer greater payment to forgo condom use to dependent users (Johnston, 2010).



Exchange sex items

- Exchanged sex for money in lifetime
- Exchanged sex for drugs in lifetime
- Exchanged sex as a stress coping strategy in response to an item that presented “traded sex for something you wanted or needed” as a possible response to the question “When I felt stressed I...”

Descriptive Results

- Out of 154 youth, 30 (20%) reported exchange sex
- Of these:
 - Twenty-one (70%) exchanged sex for drugs
 - Nineteen (63%) exchanged sex for money
 - Twenty-seven (90%) reported doing it for money or drugs as a stress coping mechanism.

Descriptive Results (cont.)

- Had an intimate partner: 41%
- Had 20 or more lifetime partners: 26%
- Prevalence of exchange sex approximately equal between males and females (20% vs. 17%)
- Substance use in previous 6 months:
 - Marijuana: 91%
 - Binge drinking: 62%
 - Amphetamines: 33%
 - Cocaine: 24%
 - Heroin: 14%

Multivariate Analyses*: Logistic Regression

- Significant associations with **having ever practiced exchange sex in their lifetime***:
 - Substance use in previous 6 months:
 - crack (OR 4.26, $p = .000$)
 - amphetamines (OR 3.44, $p = .001$)
 - cocaine (OR 3.00, $p = .033$)
 - heroin (OR 2.14, $p = .033$)
 - injection drug use past 6 mo. (OR 2.52, $p = .012$)

* Controlling for age, race/ethnicity, and gender

Multivariate Analyses: Logistic Regression

- Odds of practicing exchange sex increased significantly with age (OR = 3.27, $p=.001$) but were not statistically significant for White vs. Minority race/ethnicity or for gender.
- Odds of exchange sex increased with a greater number of same sex partners ($p=.004$) only among males.

Discussion

- Drug use drives the practice of exchange sex among youth more than any demographic characteristic part from age.
- Stimulants were associated with higher odds of exchange sex than other classes of drugs.
- Consistent with previous research, injection drug use is a key correlate of exchange sex.

Discussion

- In this sample, just as many young men engaged in exchange sex as young women.
- The odds of exchange sex increased with a greater number of same-sex partners ($p=.004$) only among males.
- These results indicate that male homeless youth should be equally targeted for risk reduction interventions to prevent harm from exchange sex.

Recommendations

- Harm reduction and structural interventions are needed to minimize health and safety risks of sexual victimization, other violence, and infectious disease for youth who practice exchange sex.
- Interventions should target both male and female youth
- Low threshold housing and greater availability of drug treatment services would reduce the risks associated with exchange sex among homeless youth.

