PSYCHOSOCIAL REVIEW ON SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUTH TRANSGENDER IN PENANG, MALAYSIA

A QUALITATIVE IN PENANG, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This qualitative study was conducted in Penang, Malaysia with the aim to analyze and gather in-depth understanding of challenges faced by youth Transgender who engaged with substance drug used. This study also aims to understand some of the psychosocial support received by this marginal population in term of overcoming their substance use behaviour. Selection of 18 respondents was through the snowballing sampling technique due to the difficulty of getting the targeted respondents. Respondents who have participated in this study were among transgender populations between the ages of 18-40. The study findings indicated that almost all the respondents have never taken drugs in their life but only 4 respondents who have experienced taking cannabis and methamphetamine ecstasy or over a period of 12 months ago. This study suggests that both government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should continue to provide appropriate HIV and AIDS intervention among the transgender population. Social work intervention primarily in educating this marginal population towards the prevention of HIV transmission especially preventing from drugs substance uses which are associated with behaviors that facilitate HIV transmission in their daily life.

Key Words: Youth transgender, Substance use and Psychosocial

Introduction

Previous research demonstrates that transgender people experience prolonged bias, as to a great degree high rates of physical mistreatment, rape, discrimination on job opportunities (Herbst et al., 2008), and sexual harassment (Factor and Rothblum, 2008; Grant, Mottet, and Tanis, 2011). Past research studies shows uplifted rates of substance use disorders (Kecojevic et al., 2012; McCabe et al., 2013; Mereish and Bradford, 2014) and treatment-looking for substance abuse (Cochran and Mays, 2000; McCabe et al., 2013) among lesbian,gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people contrasted with heterosexual population.
Besides that, a meta-examination of accessible exploration demonstrates high rates of substance use among transgender people (Herbst et al., 2008), while nearby needs appraisal exploration of transgender people in Washington, DC recognized high rates of substance use issue among the transgender group (Xavier, 2000). There are a few unanswered inquiries, or disputable issues, about substance misuse and substance misuse treatment among LGBT people.

Meyer's minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), initially created to clarify expanded emotional wellness and substance use hazard among lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, sets that individuals from minority gatherings may encounter extra stretch as a consequence of disgrace connected with their minority bunch participation. This model was connected to transgender people (Hendricks and Testa, 2012), and proposes that expanded encounters of bias, desires of encountering preference, out classed of one's minority status, and disguise of social disgrace are procedures that put transgender people at danger for poorer wellbeing, substance use, and psychological well-being results.

Study Objective

This study aims to analyze and gather an in-depth understanding of challengers faced by youth transgender who engaged with substance drug used. In the same time, this study aims to understand some of the psychosocial supports received by this marginal population in term of overcoming their substance use behaviour.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted in Penang, Malaysia. Selection of 18 respondents was conducted through a snowballing sampling technique due to the difficulty of getting the desired respondents. Respondents who have participated in this study were those of transgender population between the ages of 18-40 years. This chosen age range also represents the two largest populations in Malaysia which are at risk of living with HIV/AIDS. Each of the interviews were analysed and transcribed carefully in order to ensure the accuracy of the data. A content analysis was conducted to better understand on the emerging themes and sub-themes of the collected data.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted a total of 18 face-to-face audio-recorded interviews. Prior to the interview, the researcher has verbally reviewed the research information sheet of each respondent, describing the nature of the study, its risks and benefits. All respondents have given their consent to participate in this study. A semi-structured interview was used as a guidance to gather an in-depth understanding of challengers faced by youth transgender especially to analyze the psychosocial supports received by this marginal population in term of overcoming their substance drug used behaviour. The semi structured interview instrument has allowed participants to respond more freely and answer questions in an open-ended way.
Study Findings

Two (2) major themes have been identified in this study. The themes include (1) the challengers faced by youth transgender who engaged with substance drug used (2) psychosocial supports received by this marginal population in term of overcoming their substance use behaviour. Elaborations on the two main findings are presented in the following discussion.

a) Drugs Substance Use Behaviour Among Respondents

Past studies have revealed that almost half of the sample reported using alcohol (45%) and any non-injection drug use (49%) in the last 30 days. The most commonly used drugs are amphetamines (40%), cannabis (20%) and ecstasy (10%). Four percent reported injecting drugs within the past 30 days. In line with previous studies that showed that transgender people are involved in cases of drug consumption behaviour perversion with about 25% of transgender people in the United States for the study reported non-cannabis drugs like cocaine, crack, amphetamines, or heroin (Garofalo, DeLeon, Osmer, Doll, & Harper, 2006.; Herbst et al, 2008).

This study indicated that almost all the respondents have never taken drugs but there were only 4 respondents who have taken cannabis and methamphetamine or ecstasy for the past last 12 months. All the 4 respondents emphasized that the main reason drugs were taken because they wanted to have fun and curious of trying and feeling how drugs will react in their behaviour especially enjoying in the night clubs with their sexual partners. But currently, they no longer were taking drugs in their daily lives.

However, only one of the respondents stated that the main reason of taking drugs previously because the respondents suffered from depression as a result of discrimination in the local community who can’t accept the respondents’ gender identity especially the life style of transgender women when a men behaved as a women which are against the norms and culture of the local society. Besides that, all 4 of these respondents does agreed that taking drugs is one of the way making them forget their personal problem especially whenever their life partner (male) who left them alone or breaking off in a relationship as boyfriend and girlfriend in their daily life.

In the same time, the research finding indicated that, all 4 of these respondents previously have been working as sex worker to earn for a living. These entire 4 respondents have admitted that before having sex with their customers, they really voluntarily desperate needed to take drugs to alleviate pain from sexual activity as a result from offering sexual services maximally up to 5 people in one day. There are also situations where several customers have committed violent sexual intercourse such as beating and slapping these respondents while having sexual intercourse. As a result of the injuries suffered by the respondent, this situation has caused them relied on drugs substance used. By depending on drug used, these respondents admitted that, taking drugs before having sex have really reduced their pain especially focusing on the physical and emotional aspects towards dealing with customers who practiced sexual violence with these respondents.
The research results clearly showed that there were different ways used by these 4 respondents towards ending substance drug used. All respondents agreed that one of the factors that have caused them to stop taking is due to the inner spirit of them self. The respondents have agreed that substance drug used has caused long-term health problems in their daily life. Due appalling health status, finally these respondents then eventually resolve to stop taking drugs until present days.

However, this research finding indicated that there was one of the respondents stated that he had been arrested three times by the police due to drug abuse behaviour. Besides that, this respondent was undergoing drug rehabilitation in rehabilitation centres in Malaysia. During his stay in the drug rehabilitation centre for 1.5 years, this respondent felt miserable and sad. As a result of staying in an uncomfortable place in a drug rehabilitation centre, finally this respondent decided to quit taking the drug even today.

Mistreatment from the transgender people itself against the respondent as a result of injecting drug abuse thru needles used have caused the respondent to be despised in the transgender community. Some transgender community considers transgender people who take drugs by injection needle are subordinate class groups in the transgender community. As a result of ridicule and insult, the respondent has committed to stop taking the drug even today. In this research, the support of family members does not contribute directly to stop taking the drug among these respondents because their drug activity perversion unknown to their family members.

**Discussion**

The results of this research clearly demonstrate that environmental factor of these respondents have influenced their decision involving in drug abuse in their lives. Even though there were only 4 respondents have a history of substance drugs used throughout this study, however, this situation is worrying our Malaysian society because these transgender people have been using drugs at a young age. Besides that, the most alarming situation in term of HIV transmission, all the 18 respondents including 4 respondents who have a history of drug haven’t taken VCT test more than a year to detect the presence of HIV virus in their bodies. VCT tests should be performed by respondents as all respondents were involved actively with unsafe sex without using a condom. Even among the four respondents themselves doesn’t know their HIV status even there were probabilities of these respondents infected with HIV through substance drug use through sharing needles and drug injection equipment.

**Conclusion**

As a conclusion, majority of the respondents in this research have not been tested VCT despite some of these respondents have involved in substance drug user in their past life. This study clearly indicated that there still a high at risk or more vulnerable to HIV transmission among these transgender women population in Malaysia especially in Penang state. This study suggests that both government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should continue to provide appropriate HIV and AIDS intervention among the transgender population. Social work intervention primarily in educating this marginal population towards the prevention of HIV
transmission especially preventing from drugs substance uses which are associated with behaviours that facilitate HIV transmission in their daily life.

References


