

ADDRESSING SEXUALIZED DRUG USE IN SRI LANKA: DESIGNING AND DEVELOPING A TARGETED CHEMSEX INTERVENTION PACKAGE FOR MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

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BACKGROUND

- Sexualized drug use (chemsex) of amphetamine type substances (ATS) among men who have sex with men, and transgender women is a growing issue and is contributing to increasing HIV prevalence in Sri Lanka.
- Based on data collected by local outreach workers of those who tested positive for HIV (n=52), approximately 75% reported use of ATS and engaging in chemsex. Ice or crystal methamphetamine is reportedly the most used drug in sexualized settings.
- Whilst ice is mostly inhaled, there is anecdotal evidence of injecting amphetamines among transgender women and men who have sex with men.
- Marijuana, alcohol, cigarettes, poppers, Viagra and sedative/sleeping tablets were also reported to be used.

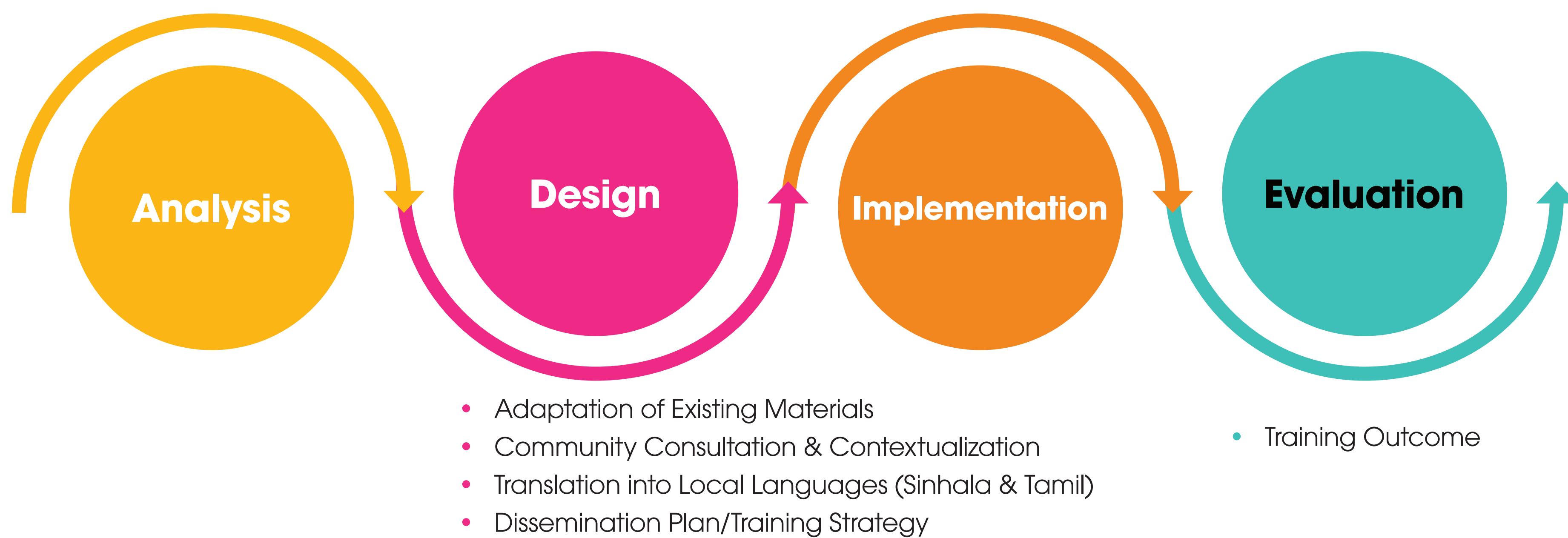
DESCRIPTION

- Through assessments and field visits, a training program was crafted for key-population community members and outreach workers. This program was adapted from Mainline's Harm Reduction School initiative.
- The Harm Reduction School offers a collection of fun and interactive online courses which aim to develop knowledge and skills of harm reduction practitioners. The e-courses are designed to provide practical tools and facilitate the implementation of effective interventions. Use of the e-courses can also be combined with (virtual) face-to-face learning to further challenge participants.
- Using this customized training, an intervention strategy covering prevention, treatment, sexual health, and PrEP was developed. Crucially, individuals engaged in chemsex actively contributed to the strategy, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness.

- Field Assessment
- Understanding Local Context
- Additional Trainings (Sensitization)

- Deliver the Training Program

Process Flow for the Development of Chem Sex Intervention in Sri Lanka



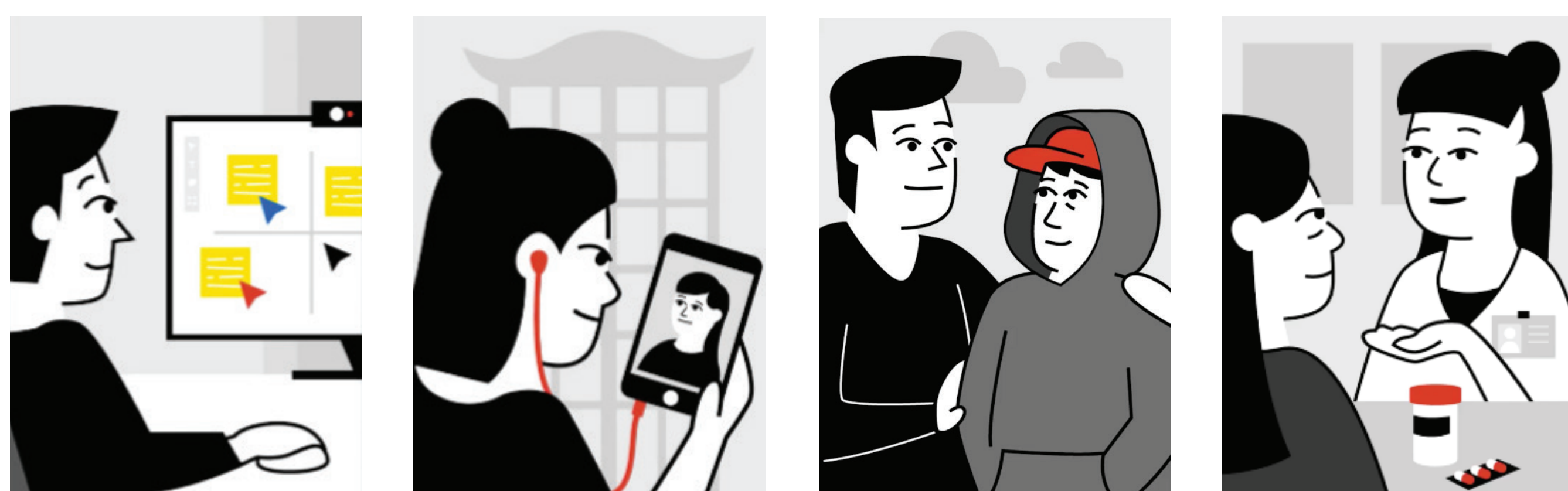
LESSONS LEARNED: EFFECTIVE CHEMSEX INTERVENTIONS

- Criminalization makes this community difficult to reach, causing significant challenges in encouraging workshop participation and driving the community further underground.
- Addressing the fear and confusion surrounding drug interactions is crucial. More resources are needed on interactions between chemsex drugs, hormones, PrEP/ARVs, and medications for chronic conditions such as hypertension.
- The Chemsex intervention package required targeted content to correct misinformation among community members about PrEP use and drug interactions.

- Chemsex intervention programs must be contextualized to the external environment of each country, considering factors such as the criminalization of homosexuality and the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, to address the drivers of sexualized drug use.
- Virtual interventions should be tailored to the platforms commonly used by the communities, such as Grindr and WhatsApp.
- Intervention packages should include activities to increase access to PrEP, reduce provider bias, reduce misinformation, and strengthen linkages to other community-led HIV initiatives. These should involve PrEP demand generation targeting chemsex users.
- Transgender individuals have distinct needs for chemsex harm reduction compared to men who have sex with men, necessitating specialized topics on gender reassignment surgery and chemsex risks for transgender sex workers post-surgery.

SKPA-2 SRI LANKA CHEMSEX TOOLS DEVELOPED

- In collaboration with Mainline Foundation, the APCOM, FPASL, SCDI, and Health Equity Matters team consulted with community members who engage in chemsex to adapt the Mainline Foundation's chemsex training manual to better suit the Sri Lankan context.
- This adaptation involved translating the manual into the local languages of Sinhalese and Tamil, making it an accessible online resource for community members.
- APCOM partnered with FPA to tailor existing digital content on chemsex and sexualized drug use for the local audience, translating these materials into Sinhalese and Tamil.



CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS

- The SKPA-2 program Chemsex intervention package provides a unique example from Asia that can be adapted for other countries facing high levels of stigma.
- This program helps to build on the emerging literature on how to utilize harm reduction approaches to respond to sexualized drug use in a contextually appropriate way.
- To further ensure sustainable learning and long-term success, we recommend:
 - That a "train the trainers" model be integrated into the National STD/AIDS Control Program (NSACP).
 - That a cadre of Chemsex experts be developed to disseminate knowledge and skills.
 - That practices be embedded into national frameworks and training materials be translated into local languages to ensure accessibility and cultural relevance.
 - That inclusivity and broad participation be promoted across community sectors.
 - Further steps should include rigorous evaluation of training outcomes and continuous adaptation based on participant feedback, refining strategies to meet the evolving needs of Chemsex communities.

For more information about the poster please contact:

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