

Chemsex in the transgender community

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APCS

Asia-Pacific **Chemsex** Symposium

Pleasures, Policies, Possibilities

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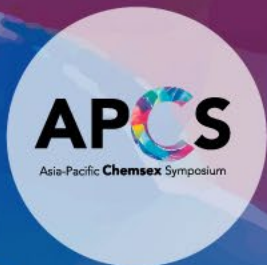
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Outline

- Background on chemsex and transgender people in Asia and the Pacific
- Preliminary data from T-REX study
- Comprehensive harm reduction service framework
- Conclusions



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Background

- While chemsex is often linked to MSM, chemsex is also used among transgender communities.
- Transgender women actually have higher rates of chemsex use compared to MSM in some reports¹.
- Lifetime substance use disorder diagnoses were highest among young trans woman (18.0%) and young trans men (17.5%) relative to young non-binary people (9.7%)².
- Highest risk of substance use was observed among trans youth who experienced discrimination, intimate partner abuse, peer rejection, and lack of family support².

¹ Goldsmith and Hillyard, 2019; ² Bailey et al, 2024

Background (cont')

- A survey among Thai transgender women engaging in sex work revealed a considerable differences in the prevalence of chemsex use between types of sexual partners, as 43% and 23% reported engaging in chemsex with customers and primary partner, respectively¹.
- 50% of transgender women exhibited problematic alcohol drinking levels (AUDIT-C ≥ 4)².

¹ Nemoto et al, 2012; ² Yimsaard et al, 2024

Tangerine Clinic

Figure 2

Factors associated with sexualized and non-sexualized substance use among transgender women clients at Tangerine Clinic from April 2021-March 2023

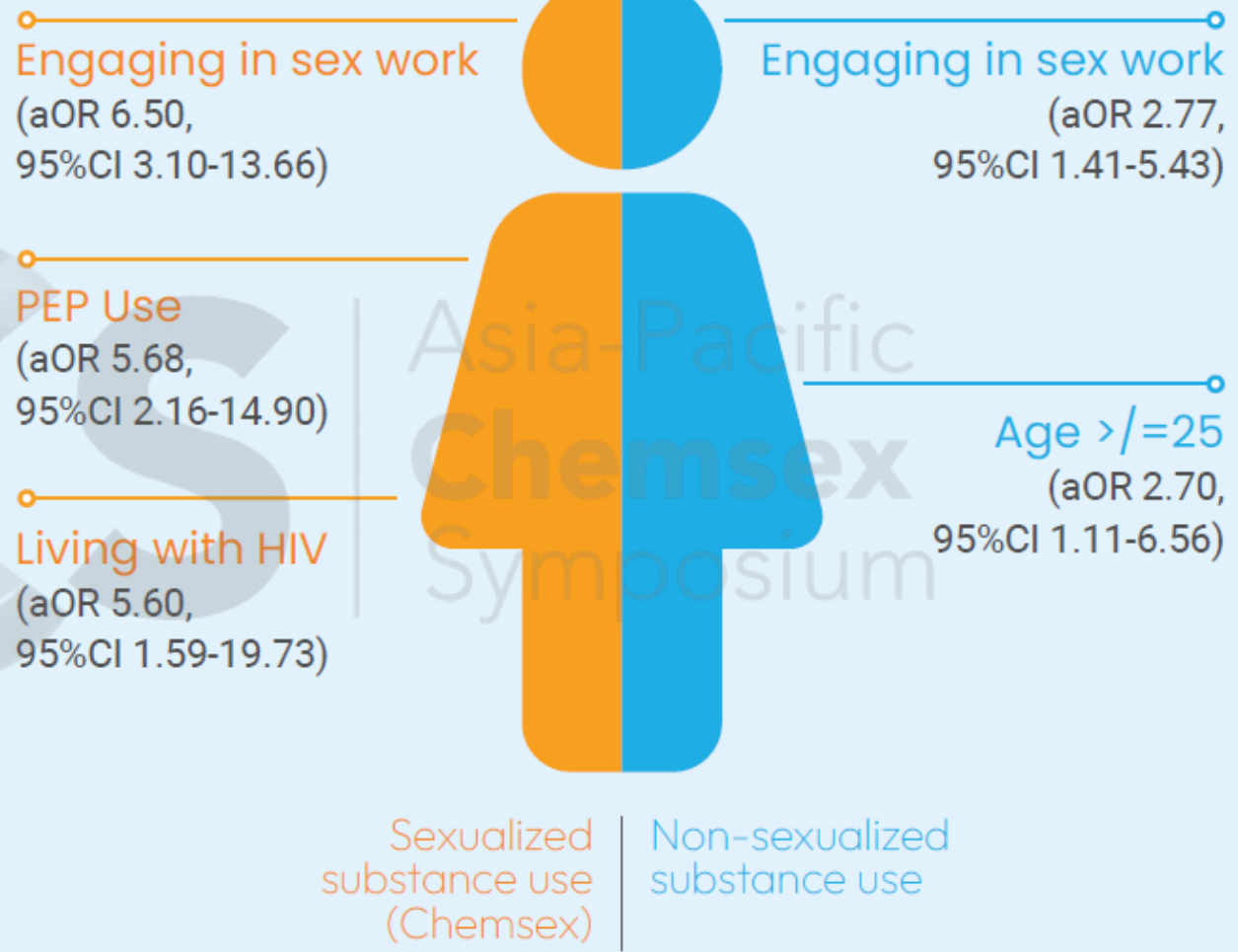
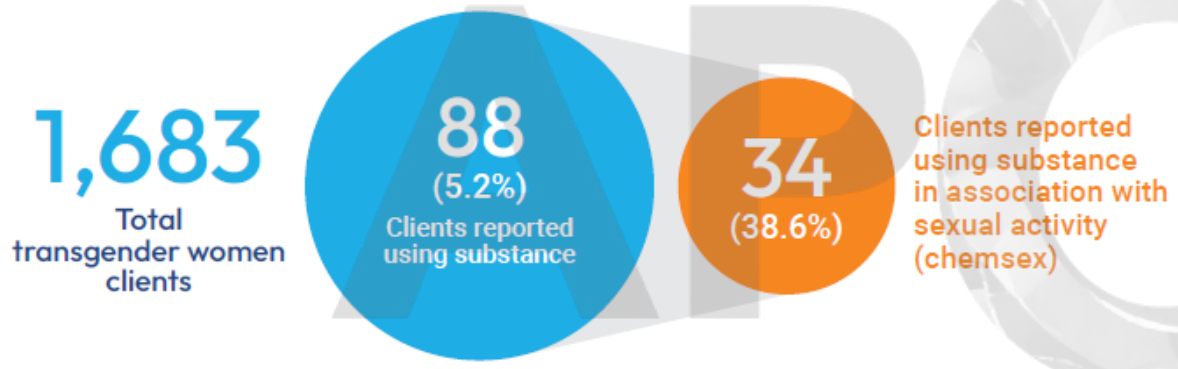


Figure 1

Transgender women clients and substance use at Tangerine Clinic from April 2021-March 2023



Samitpol et al., IAS 2023, Brisbane, Australia.

Chemsex & substance use among transgender people in Asia

Variable	Frequency (%)
How often have you had chemsex (last 3 months)? (n=302)	
Never	282 (93%)
Once	10 (3%)
2-5 times	10 (3%)
More than 5 times	0 (0.0)
Substance, alcohol, and cigarette use (n=334)	
Alcohol	171 (51%)
Injectable Drugs	2 (1%)
Non-injecting Drugs	13 (4%)
Smoking	55 (17%)
None	93 (28%)

The South-East Asian Transgender Health and HIV Cohort Study (SEATrans)



The first Asian transgender cohort study

Funded by:
 US NIH through the International Epidemiology Databases to Evaluate AIDS (IeDEA), IeDEA Asia-Pacific (U01AI069907)

Pre-implementation study to develop Trans-tailored services for transgender persons in Relation to chemsEX: T-REX

A cross-sectional study to explore various facets of chemsex use among transgender populations, gaining inputs from multiple stakeholders to guide the development of chemsex services tailored to the need of the transgender community

Objectives

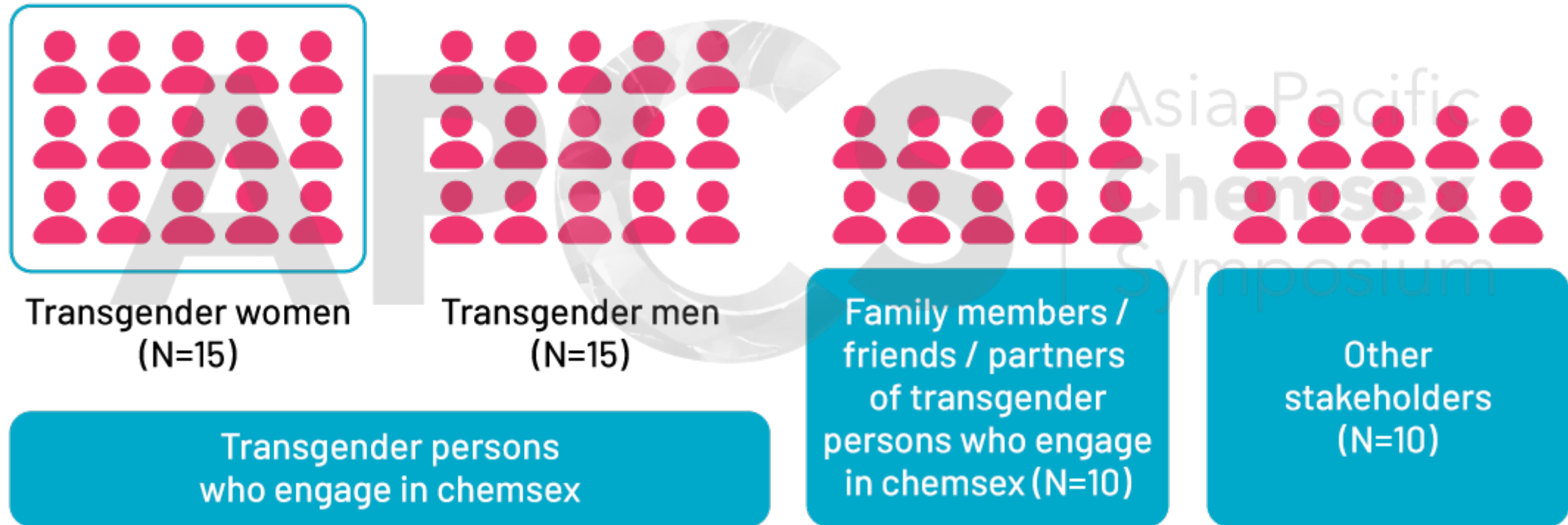
- To explore the reasons for engaging in chemsex and the patterns of chemsex use among transgender persons
- To explore the perceived positive and negative impacts of chemsex on physical health, sexual health, mental health, and social and legal aspects of life
- To explore the components necessary for a trans-tailored chemsex service and the facilitators and barriers to implementing such a service, from the transgender persons' perspectives, their family members, healthcare providers, and other policy makers

Hiransuthikul A., et al., Poster Presentation, APCS 2024, Thailand

Methods

- T-REX study plans to enroll three groups of participants (total N=50)

For this analysis



Hiransuthikul A., et al., Poster Presentation, APCS 2024, Thailand

Preliminary findings

- Sex work was believed to be an influence to their patterns of use and motivations

		Autonomy in decision-making on substance type/ frequency/ route of administration	Motivations
Transgender women engaging in sex work?	YES	Little-to-no control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial incentives • Prolonging sexual performance • Coping with job demands • Meeting clients' expectations
	NO	Within control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual pleasure and psychological satisfaction • Thai/Asian beauty standards • Self-determination • Validation of transgender identity

Hiransuthikul A., et al., Poster Presentation, APCS 2024, Thailand

Preliminary findings (cont.)

Physical harms

Physical deterioration
x
Sleep disturbance

Psychological harms

Mood irritability

Legal harms

Harassment and
violations
from law
enforcement officers

Hiransuthikul A., et al., Poster Presentation, APCS 2024, Thailand

Preliminary findings (cont.)

- Most participants would advise others against chemsex use.
- None of the participants had sought help for chemsex services, citing anticipated and internalized stigma related to transgender identity, HIV, chemsex, and fear of being arrested.
- Most harm reduction efforts involved adjusting substance types and frequencies based on their past personal experiences with harms.



*Pleasures
Policies
Possibilities*

Comprehensive harm reduction service package

by service components (based on CLYMAX study)

- 1 Drug use literacy & skills:** education, counseling, and skill building around substances and uses (type, positive/negative impacts, route of administration, dosage, frequency, equipment), trauma, violence, overdose, and giving/obtaining consent to sex and substance use (in the context of sexualized drug use)
- 2 Community-based long-term opioid agonist therapy,** i.e., methadone, buprenorphine
- 3 Overdose management by family/community,** i.e., take-home/community-based naloxone
- 4 Voluntary treatment/support for reducing/stopping substance use**
- 5 Needles and syringes**
- 6 TB screening, diagnosis, and treatment**

Substance-use specific harm reduction services

Sexual health harm reduction services

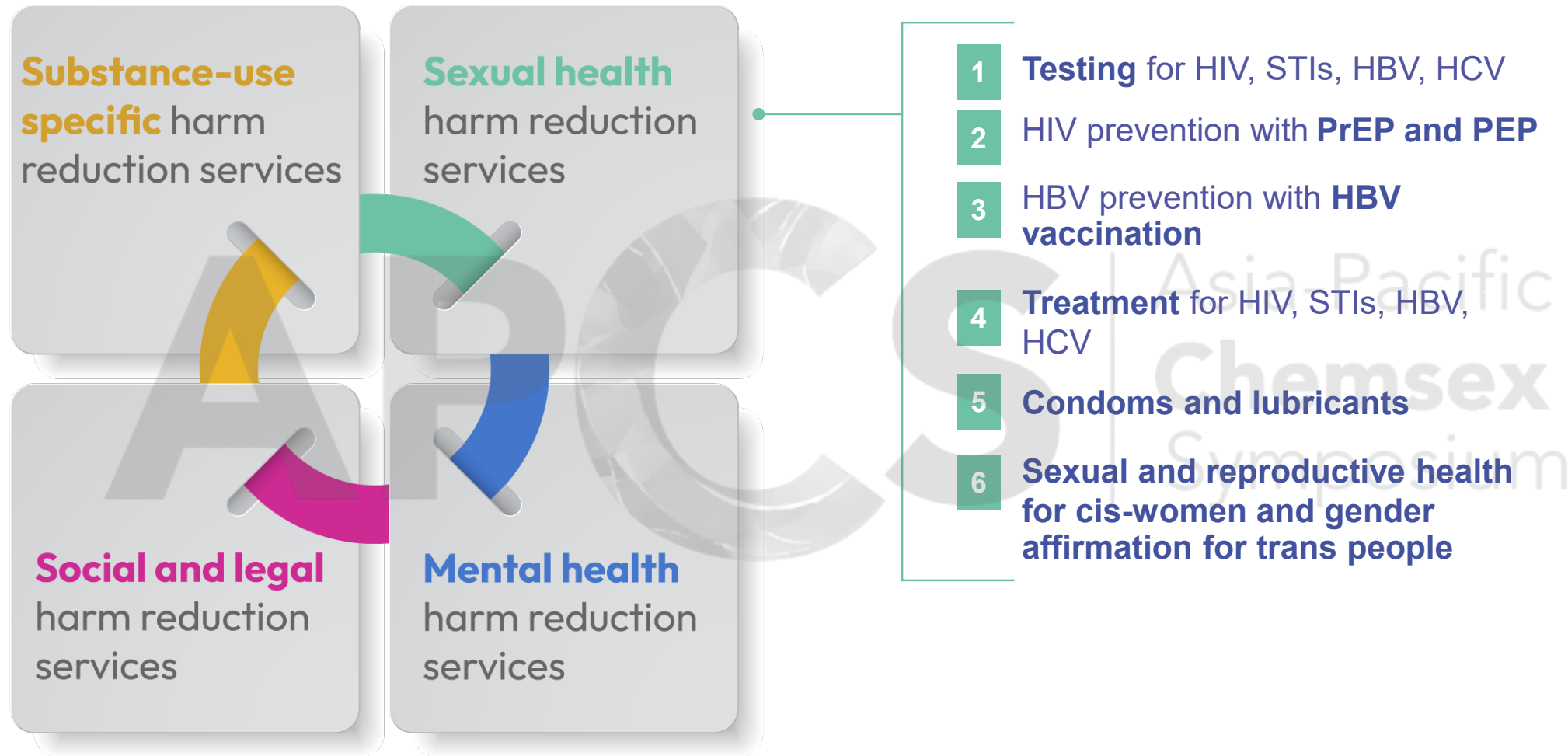
Social and legal harm reduction services

Mental health harm reduction services

Phanuphak N., et al., CLYMAX study, 2023, Thailand

Comprehensive harm reduction service package

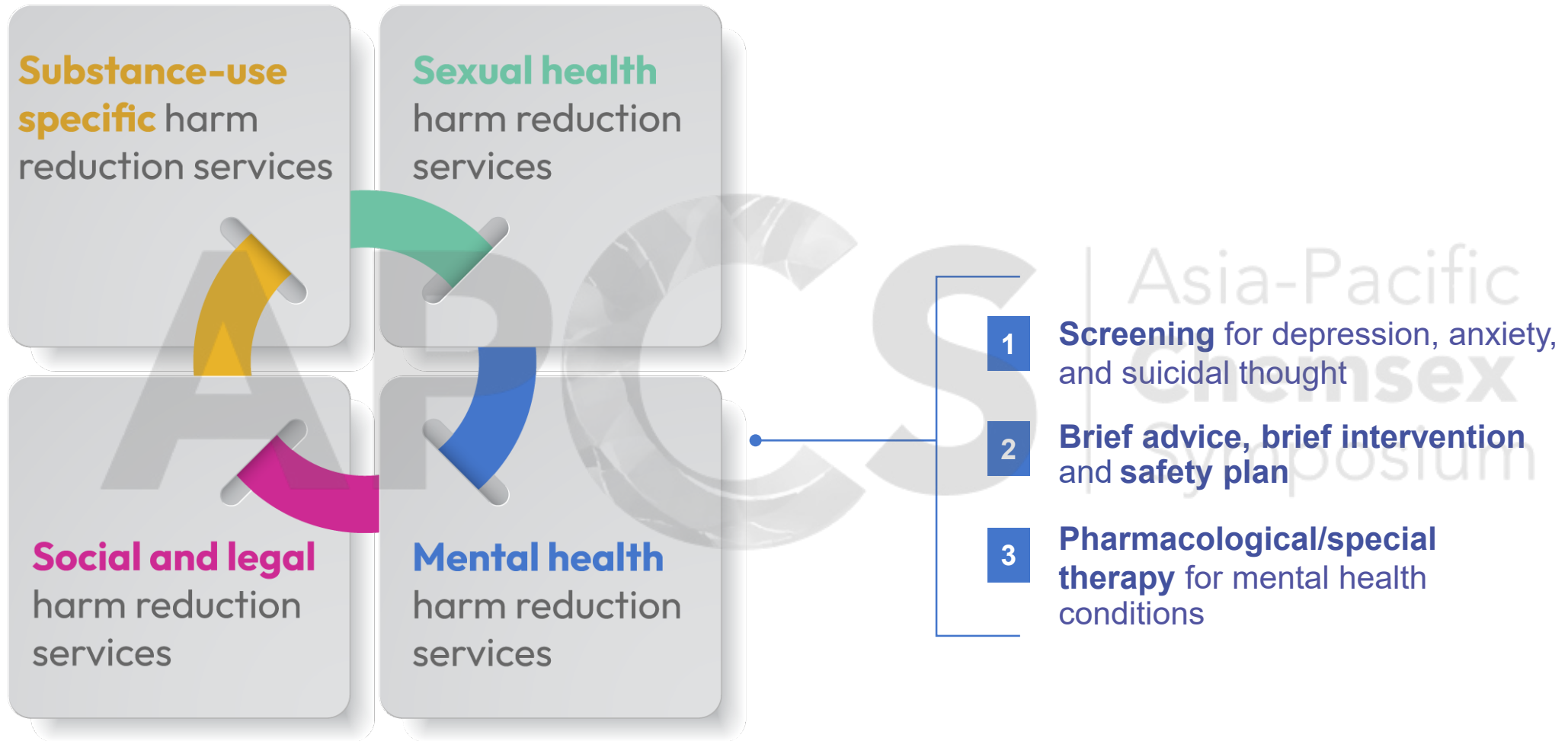
by service components (based on CLYMAX study)



Phanuphak N., et al., CLYMAX study, 2023, Thailand

Comprehensive harm reduction service package

by service components (based on CLYMAX study)

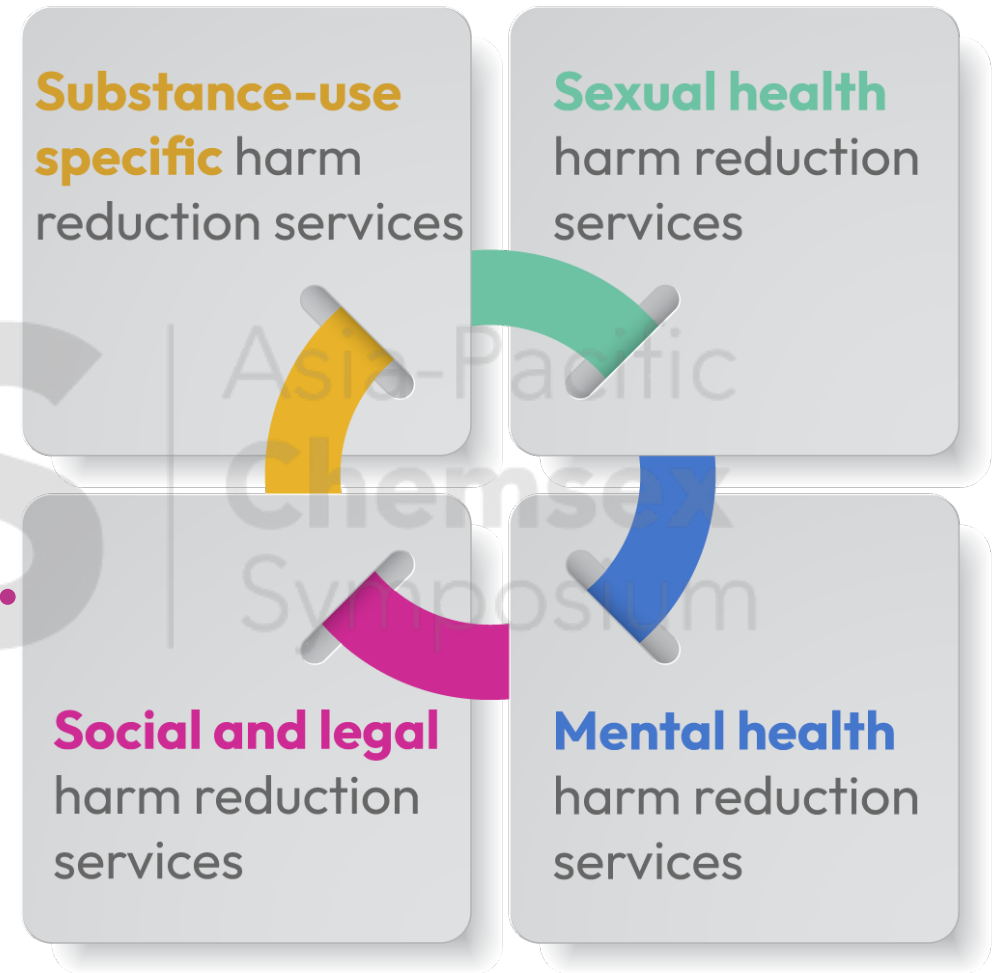


Phanuphak N., et al., CLYMAX study, 2023, Thailand

Comprehensive harm reduction service package

by service component (based on CLYMAX study)

- 1 **Screening for stigma (including internalized stigma), discrimination, and rights violation** in family, educational setting, workplace, or by law enforcement officers
- 2 **Counseling and skill building on managing stigma and discrimination (including internalized stigma)** (including internalized stigma)
- 3 **Support and navigation through the justice system processes**
- 4 **Social need assessment** (education, work, accommodation) and **referral** to get support
- 5 **Rights literacy**
- 6 **Group support/well-being support**
- 7 **Home visit**
- 8 **Family service** (education, counseling, skill building, coping strategy, group support, mental health/well-being support for family members)



Phanuphak N., et al., CLYMAX study, 2023, Thailand

Comprehensive service package at Tangerine Clinic

Hormone

- Counseling on gender transition
- Hormone prescription
- Hormone level monitoring

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Peer counseling, psychosocial intervention, psychiatric medications
- Minor gender-affirming surgery and aesthetics
- Referral for genital surgery
- Referral for legal assistance



Sexual health

- HIV testing, syphilis testing
- Condom and lubricant
- Anal, cervical, and neovaginal Pap smears
- High resolution anoscopy and neovaginoscopy
- PrEP and PEP
- ARV treatment, CD4 counts and viral load testing
- STI treatment
- Vaccination for hepatitis A, B and HPV
- Neovagina care

Developing trans-tailored harm reduction services at Tangerine Clinic

- Series of training on chemsex specific, mental health, narcotics laws, social welfare, and legal assistance
- Sensitization training to clinic staff
- Portable harm reduction kits
- Pleasure-focused counseling (TBD)
- Harm reduction-specific communication materials



Comprehensive health service package

loveyourself **TANGERINE**
#เลือกที่ใช้สำหรับคุณ

PrEP
is almost **100%** effective at preventing HIV.

PrEP is for everyone. The choice is yours.

Contact our staff for PrEP services.

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#WhatWorksForU

Use hormones safely and effectively for your long-term wellbeing. Maximize effect with minimal usage.

Contact our staff for free consultation and hormone level check-up!

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Interested in harm reduction for **chemsex** or **substance use**?

Contact our staff for more information.

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Mental health matters! Feeling down, stressed, depressed?

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#WhatWorksForU

Collect samples by yourself for **Gonorrhea & Chlamydia test**, even without symptoms!

Contact our staff for free self-sampling collection kits.

Conclusions

- Studies to understand narratives of chemsex use among transgender populations are needed across multiple socio-cultural contexts in Asia and the Pacific.
- In addition to sexual health, services addressing chemsex-specific, mental health, social and legal harm reductions tailored to unique needs of transgender populations with diverse backgrounds are essential.
- Interventions addressing intersectional stigma and shifting from risk-based to pleasure-focused approach may create enabling environment for harm reduction service provision.

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