

## Chemsex Research in Pakistan

The primary purpose of this research was to address the gaps in available knowledge relating to substance abuse and misuse within the key MSM (men who have sex with men) and transgender populations, with a specific focus on chemsex in Pakistan. UNDP-GF, who funded the research, also required evidence-based research to start the work on chemsex issues to support and start intervention work in chemsex to reduce the harm.

People of diverse SOGIESC identities face greater threats to their wellbeing in the form of stigma and discrimination. This increased experience of stress has a proven link with the engagement and use of substances. While it has been theorized such a link exists in Asia and specifically in Pakistan, there is a need for evidence-based research to study the link between this vulnerable community and the use and misuse of substances, and engagement with chemsex activities.

There were a total 319 survey respondents for this research, complemented with key informant interviews with 10 HIV-negative chemsex practitioners and 10 HIV-positive chemsex practitioners. Majority of the chemsex practitioners are using methamphetamine (crystal meth) and suffering from multiple issues. High percentage of respondents are facing mental health issues however, there is no specific support pertaining to these issues in Pakistan. During the deep interviews, it is found that some of MSM respondents contracted HIV due to the practice of chemsex.

Below are snippets of interviews with the research participants.

*“I love high fun. Chemsex makes me happy and satisfied, and my need of long session of sex with chemsex helps me to reduce the anxiety.”*

*“I lost my job due to chemsex. Sometimes I have no money to buy the drugs, so I do sex work for it.”*

*“Friends creating stigma and discrimination when they know I am into chemsex.”*

The complex nature of stigma faced by these communities is compounded even further, due to the nature of discrimination around the use of substances, living with HIV and engaging in chemsex. Therefore, there is a need to investigate complex routes of intervention and to use multifaceted and evidence-based policies and guidelines to improve access to medications, healthcare, mental healthcare, and substance use support in the communities.

With the research, there is now of evidence to form recommendations for intervention work in the chemsex issues in Pakistan for MSM and transgender populations.

### **Yasir Ali Khan – Pakistan**

*Yasir Ali Khan is a PLHIV and Peer Worker/Activist from Pakistan, with specific focus on Chemsex and Harm Reduction. He runs numerous support groups for the treatment, prevention, and testing of HIV and*

*support groups for the issues of drugs within the community, especially with chemsex practitioners who are infected with HIV. He is representing Pakistan as vice chairperson in [Network of Asian People who Use Drugs \(NAPUD\)](#) and also the part of technical working group of Asia Chemsex Platform.*

*Yasir started to voice the issues of chemsex in 2018 and created a platform - HIV Buddies and started support groups with the help of HOPE: Have Only Positive Expectations. In 2020 he conducted research work on chemsex issues among men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender communities for UNDP Pakistan.*