



Centre for Social Research in Health

Episode 1 - Crystal: The Beauty and the Trap

VOICEOVER

Crystal Clear: Negotiating Pleasures and Risk around Sex on Crystal.

This podcast series is part of the Crystal Pleasures and Sex between Men project.

Please assess your own capacity to listen, in case this podcast is triggering or upsetting to you.

This podcast is recorded on Bedegal Land.

The host of this podcast series is Tobin Saunders. Tobin is a proud, gay, HIV-positive health-educator and peer-activist. He's a longstanding and well-respected agitator for social change.

TOBIN

I'm your host, Tobin Saunders.

It's important that we can talk openly and without judgement about crystal methamphetamine. Crystal is commonly used in combination with sex among gay and bisexual men in Australia.

Today we will be talking to gay and bisexual men with lived experiences of crystal use, exploring their perceptions of its pleasure and risk, what concerns them about their use, and how they managed it. We have three guests on this podcast, Bill, Trav and Joey who will each be

*it was
euphoric and this extreme horniness that comes over you just in an instant. And everyone seems
to*

, you know, immediately rip off their pants or whatever!

TOBIN

Let's start with Bill. Bill has been using drugs socially for about 40 years and now works as a consultant in the fields of harm reduction and gay men's sexual health.

So Bill, how does that excerpt resonate with your experiences of using crystal for sex?

BILL

One of the problems with meth is that when you meet someone, what's really happening in your head is "wow who is this man, he is fantastic, we should go on like this forever because he's the one". I think that's what's going through the head of most gay men in that situation. But in fact it's the drug causing you to think that way. But in the heat of the moment, that's not what you are aware of.

The pleasure of it is caught up with the excitement and the wonder and the hopes and the dreams and the expectations and all these sorts of things. I think when we talk about crystal and sex, we don't acknowledge the kind of sex that people have. People will be open to exploration and fantasy and games and behaviours that they probably wouldn't ordinarily do. Everyone says they feel like a porn star. That's not simply because of their performance, but it's because they feel like they're in the middle of a fantasy.

That might not be addictive, but it's certainly incredibly attractive and memorable and makes you very eager to see what can happen next time.

TOBIN

It almost sounds like two types of sex? Crystal or non-crystal sex?

BILL

[laughs] And that's why crystal is so attractive.

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TOBIN

What is pleasurable and what is risky often don't stay the same. Instead perceptions and experience of crystal can change over time and according to different circumstances.

Next we'll hear from those same men about some of the ways that they've assessed changing risk and how they managed their use.

Let's listen to a second excerpt of an interview from the project. This is from Harry, a 53 year old man in Adelaide.

EXCERPT

*that. I said,
terms o*

well this is the

TOBIN

Let's hear from Joey.

Joey is a 65 year old gay man living with HIV, in a long terms serodiscordant relationship. He and his partner occasionally use crystal to enhance the sex they have together in ways that prioritise the pleasure and safety for them both.

Joey what are your thoughts on this?

JOEY

I think when I was first introduced to crystal with my partner, I found it quite overwhelming, the first experience. When I tried crystal, it was like "whoa, this is a bit more intense". After our first play

TOBIN:

So Trav, how does this resonate with your experience of using crystal for sex compared to maybe other drugs?

TRAV

That culture of care and safety, like, that went on with Ecstasy, I just feel was completely not there when it came to using ice. And that the primal and primeness and all of that that, like, in the complete tunnel vision towards sex sometimes, I guess took away from that care and safety. Well in my circle anyway.

* * *

I do think though is what we need to do is to talk about the unique qualities of crystal and why I say that there's a beauty and a trap. Which is, yes, there's a beauty, which is that it gives you immense pleasure and the opportunities to explore all these things. But you need to be aware that it's the drug doing it and if you keep pursuing the drug, then it can slide very easily. And we see that a lot with gay men. It slides into becoming problematic. And I think that's where we need to be talking as a community so that that's acknowledged and recognised and that people can be aware of it or their friends can be aware of it or the community as a whole can be more aware of it. So that we talk in a black and white way about the nature of the drug.

TOBIN

Trav, what triggered you or what made you consider abstaining from crystal?

TRAV

My recreational use of crystal is not as high as it used to be. I used to use it a lot, but now I use it less often. I think that's because I've become more aware of the risks and the potential for addiction. I also think that the community has become more supportive and understanding, which has helped me to feel more comfortable about my choices.

Having done that then, I have to be careful because if you are on apps and you are looking at hooking up, then you are constantly being asked if you are wired or if you want to hook up and use drugs. And that can be difficult for me, because you look at the bloke on the app and you think “wow” and straight away your head goes into all the possibilities. But I decided that I don’t want to do that. I just make very clear that I don’t use drugs, and we see where it goes from there.

TOBIN

So how does that sit with you Trav?

TRAV

To tell you the truth, probably, like, part of me and I’d probably call it a bit of FOMO, fear of

So not all use has to be experienced as problematic in order to seek advice, help or resources.

VOICEOVER:

You've been listening to *Crystal Clear: Negotiating Pleasures and Risk around Sex on Crystal*.

This podcast is produced by the Centre for Social Research in Health at UNSW Sydney in partnership with ACON, Thorn Harbour Health, South Australia Mobilisation + Empowerment for Sexual Health and Western Australian Aids Council.

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Any information relayed on these podcasts is correct at the date of recording.

We would like to thank our guests, partners, collaborators and funders.

If you are worried about your or someone else's crystal use, please refer to the information on the website for help. Support is available should you need it.

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