

## Drug Use and HIV Risk Behaviors Among Transgenders

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**Project Description:** The main aim of this study is to further investigate the social and cultural determinants of drug use and HIV risk behaviors among male-to-female (MTF) transgenders. The continuation study will target MTF caucasian transgenders in San Francisco and African Americans in Oakland, CA. The recruitment of these groups in addition to the current study samples of African American, Asian and Pacific Islander (API), and Latina transgenders in San Francisco, is necessary to investigate ethnic and community differences in drug use and HIV risk behaviors in relation to access to care, transphobic experiences, community involvement, and other sociocultural factors.

**Significance:** This study will provide a systematic description of drug use and HIV risk behaviors among transgenders where risk and urgent needs for interventions are evident but research has thus far been limited. The study findings will help clarify ethnic and community differences in drug use and HIV risk behaviors in relation to cognitive sociocultural factors, and will be utilized at the collaborating community agencies to further understand the target groups and lay the groundwork for developing intervention studies in the future.

**Interesting Findings:** Data analysis based on a MTF transgenders of color study in San Francisco revealed significant ethnic differences in mental health, substance use, and HIV risk behaviors among the study participants. We conducted focus groups consisting of African American, Latina and Asian and Pacific Islander MTF transgenders (N = 48) who reside or work in San Francisco. Participants were likely to report having unprotected sex with primary partners to signify love and emotional connection, as well as to receive gender validation from their partners. In contrast, viewing sex work with customers as a business encouraged intention to use condoms. Safer sex intentions with customers were frequently undermined by urgent financial needs, which stemmed from transphobia, employment discrimination and costly procedures associated with gender transition. Participants reported using drugs as a way to cope with or escape life stresses associated with relationships, sex work, transphobia and financial hardship. (Nemoto T, Operario D, Keatley J, Villegas D. Social context of HIV risk behaviours among male-to-female transgenders of colour. *AIDS Care*. 2004 Aug;16(6):724-35)

**Project Recruitment Dates:** Now until September 31, 2006

**Project End Date:** March 31, 2007