Recent reports from Brazil reflect an increase in the prevalence of ecstasy use, as well as increases in seizures, trafficking, and manufacturing of ecstasy.

Large cities in Brazil now report widespread ecstasy and LSD use, occurring typically among young, urban middle- and upper-class clubgoers.

Little is known about the characteristics of club drug users in Brazil, nor about the relationships among ecstasy and LSD use, sexual behaviors, and psychiatric symptomatology.

Although it has yet to be investigated in the Brazilian context, previous work done elsewhere has demonstrated an association between ecstasy use and risky sexual behavior.

This study sought to understand the emerging club drug epidemic in the South of Brazil, and to investigate the extent to which Brazilian club drug users are at high risk for both physical and mental health consequences.

We examine the connections of club drug use, risky sexual behavior and psychological functioning in a sample of urban, young, LSD and/or ecstasy users in Porto Alegre, a metropolitan capital city in the South of Brazil.

Recruitment of study participants was conducted using a venue-based sampling approach.

Study eligibility criteria included:

- Men and women between the ages of 18 and 39
- Ecstasy and/or LSD use at least once in the 90 days prior to the interview.

Exclusion criteria included current treatment for drug or alcohol problems.

Potential participants were approached by project staff in the primary club scene “hot spots” of Porto Alegre (bars featuring electronic music, nightclubs, rave parties, and after-hours venues and parks).

An abbreviated version of the GAIN (Global Appraisal of Individual Needs) structured interview was the primary data collection instrument.

This version included the following sections:

- Demographics / Environment
- Substance Use
- Mental Health
- Sexual Risk Behaviors

We conducted standardized face-to-face interviews with 240 male and female ecstasy and/or LSD users.

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The sample was largely young and well-educated, and reported using a broad range of psychoactive substances. Although not shown because of space limitations, there were no important gender differences noted in drug use patterns, mental health symptoms, or sexual behaviors. The sample exhibited high levels of sexual risk behaviors, as well as sexual risks in respondents reporting non-heterosexual preference.

Participants reporting non-heterosexual preference had more than twice the odds, and recent cocaine users more than 5 times higher odds, of reporting multiple sex partners during the past 12 months. Recent cocaine use was the only significant predictor of unprotected sex. Further analyses (not shown) indicate that recent cocaine use was a marker for extensive multidrug use among those participants compared to non-cocaine users.

Sexual risk reduction and substance abuse interventions targeted to this population of club drug users are clearly needed. The investigators’ contacts with study respondents revealed that participants in Porto Alegre’s club scene regularly access information and engage their social networks through the Internet. As well, they tend to be suspicious of governmental, medical and other expert messages about sex and substance use. Peer-based intervention approaches delivered in an on-line environment may be well received and effective.