

Let's Talk about Chemsex

Welcome to Tee Jay's Let's Talk series, which is an offshoot of his podcast 'From 1991 to 2021'. The aim of this podcasting series is to get gay and bi men, or people who identify as gay and bi men to talk about their mental health more openly.

This series of podcasts may contain triggers for some people. This episode goes in depth regarding my chemsex experiences. Please listen with caution.

Chemsex Experiences

One thing people need to understand about addicts is that you do not ever intend to become one. This is the same whether it's an addiction to shopping, alcohol, sex or gambling. At the beginning they all start off harmlessly. They are all things that you equate to being happy.

This means that, when things start going downhill in your life – let's say due to a bereavement, a crisis in the family or any other life-changing experience – it makes sense that, to combat the depression or any other mental health condition, you tend to revert to an activity that was fun. Something to take your mind off whatever has happened and put it in a better place. It only becomes an addiction when that is the ONLY thing that you are doing and everything else surrounding your life, whether that is work, social activities or hobbies, are left by the wayside. You effectively give up everything in your life for this ONE activity.

As always with addicts, with me it started slowly: an ecstasy pill here, a sniff of Mcat there. It happened periodically and wasn't an issue. I could still do everything else. Please note, I am not condoning drug taking here, I'm just giving my experience of how it happened. There is a subset of gay men that have normalised drug taking. It may be at a club or within a sexual environment. It doesn't matter if you don't touch drugs at all, take them every so often or consume them daily, you will encounter this subset either in a bar, a club or on a dating app – it's inescapable.

Anyhow – back to how it started. I wasn't necessarily looking **for drugs**, until things started to go wrong, whether that was friends dying, family issues or other situations I couldn't control.

When someone showed me slamming, a slang term for injecting drugs, and another showed me how to buy legal highs off the web, I was already on the path. I don't blame anyone at all. I was already heading in that direction, it was only a matter of time before I would find someone who was as broken as I was to take me further down the rabbit hole of addiction. Also I could have said no at any time but, as I mentioned in my previous series, it only needs a cute guy for me to say, 'OK, let's give it a go'.

Chemsex is a very specific type of drug taking, and is most noticeable in the gay and bi men side of the LGBT+ community. It usually involves Mephedrone, Crystal Meth and GHB, usually at the same time in a sexual setting, and sometimes the Mephedrone and Crystal Meth are injected into your arm because the high is more intense by injection. Usually a chemsex addict has various mental health issues, such as depression, which is either tied to their coming out, societal norms or their HIV status.

Given there are gay men like myself who were educated during the enforcement of Section 28, lived through the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and then were thrown technology such as the internet and

smartphones, AND given that gay men are the highest group of drug users, the exact figures can be found in the URL in the transcript of this podcast– this was an accident waiting to happen.

This is why I have always maintained that Trans issues and Gay issues are different, unless there is an overlap, such as a Female to Male trans person who also identifies as gay. Trans people, and I am also including non-binary identifying people here, need support, but that support is specific to them and not to cis or gay-males who, if they have mental health issues, their situations are going to be different. Chemsex and the underlying mental health problems associated with it, is one of these specific cases. This is also why I am sticking to gay/bi men issues within these podcasts.

Thankfully places like 56 Dean Street are tackling these issues, and give counselling support to those who need help. As a user of their services I can say they are both non-judgmental and professional at all times. Unfortunately, this type of help can only be found in areas with a large gay population, and as a gay man who lives on the outskirts of London, I found that our local GUM clinic doesn't offer any of these services. If you are on a dating app outside major cities you can still find another chemsex user – I can easily testify to this. What puts me off them is either being contacted by someone I once knew or, half way into the conversation, chems comes up. Now that I'm clean that makes it difficult to try and find a potential boyfriend.

My next episode is about addiction programmes. Specifically, your standard drug/alcohol addiction services and how they don't represent the gay man with drug addictions. More horrifying is that chemsex has been on the rise during Covid. I'm not surprised, but I want to do something about it, and how I am going to do it will be revealed in the next episode.

This podcast was written, edited and produced by Tee Jay aka A 90's Teenager. You can find all my social media accounts in the podcast description and you can follow me on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. All music used in this podcast is available from Purple Planet. Thank you for listening.

Statistics Found Here:

<https://drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/substance-use-suds-in-lgbtq-populations>