

# Police harassment and alcohol and drug abuse is associated with poorer 6 months retention among transgender women starting ART in a clinical trial in Argentina.

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## Introduction

In Argentina, HIV morbidity and mortality is still high among transgender women (TGW). Previous studies describe that syndemic factors act as barriers to access health services.

## Objectives

Our objective was to identify psycho-social factors associated with retention in care in treatment-naïve TGW in a clinical trial.

## Methods

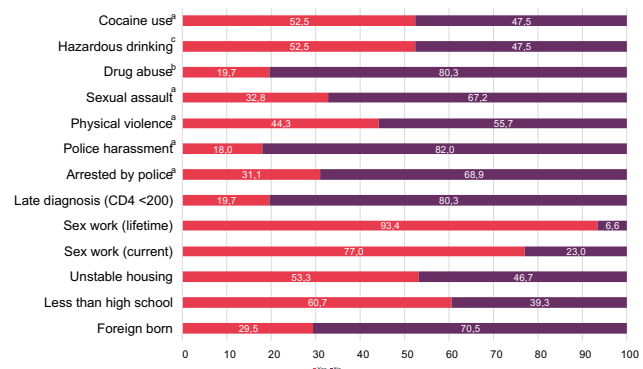
Naïve TGWs were offered to start ART in a trans-sensitive health-care service. All participants initiated Dolutegravir plus TDF-FTC. Psychosocial interviews were applied longitudinally. The questionnaire collected data regarding socio-demographic characteristics, alcohol and drug use, depression, anxiety, personality traits, HIV-related stigma, sexual behavior, interactions with police, healthcare access, housing, education, work, and experiences of stigma and discrimination in these settings. Relevant variables in this analysis were: Retention (completing assessment week-24, +/- 1 month), gender identity-related police harassment (detained longer, threatened, beaten or sexually abused by policemen last year) and subscale alcohol-related problems (AUDIT).

## Results

The sample included 61 TGW, median age was 28 (IQR 25- 32), 19.7% had less than 200 CD4 at screening. At week 24, 82% (n=50) were retained in treatment and 77.6% were virologically suppressed. As shown in Table 1, baseline psycho-social characteristics showed high levels of vulnerability: low levels of education, unstable housing, and high levels of sex work, alcohol and drugs consumption, as well as physical and sexual violence. A significant number experienced discrimination due to gender identity in last year at: healthcare services (45.9%), sex work venues (44.3%), housing (29.5%). Moreover, 31% reported being arrested and 18% experienced police harassment last year. Factors associated with loss to care, but not with the virological failure were: police harassment (OR = 0.16, 95% CI 0.03-0.71), problems related to alcohol consumption (t (46) = - 2.43, p = .019) and alcohol and drug consumption with sexual clients (t (56) = - 3.26, p = .002) (Table 2).

## Conclusions

Trans-competent health care provides a safe space for vulnerable TGW to access health services and may counteract the negative effect of previous discriminatory experiences in health settings. Nevertheless, the contextual risk environment where TGW live, work and socialize, with high exposure to violence, drugs, and discrimination and stigma may jeopardize ART expansion in this population. Future clinical research and interventions targeting this group should consider self-empowerment, drug harm-reduction and address structural-discrimination of TGW in order to improve their retention in HIV healthcare.



Note: <sup>a</sup> last year; <sup>b</sup> (DAST score >4); <sup>c</sup> (AUDIT score >8)

FIGURE 1. Sociodemographic characteristics at baseline.

TABLE 1. T-tests for psychological variables by retention group

Psychological Variables	Retention, M(SD)		t	p
	Yes (n=50)	No (n=11)		
Anxiety <sup>a</sup>	43.34 (10.05)	41.36 (12.07)	.569	.571
Depression <sup>b</sup>	18.84 (11.36)	22.09 (16.63)	.787	.435
Suicidal Ideation <sup>c</sup>	.88 (2.18)	.82 (2.14)	-.085	.932
Maladaptive Personality Traits <sup>d</sup>	33.72 (13.55)	35.27 (16.97)	.329	.744
Gender Identity Stigma <sup>e</sup>	59.26 (18.86)	58.91 (19.03)	-.056	.956
HIV-related Stigma <sup>f</sup>	90.30 (25.40)	102.36 (20.28)	1.472	.146
Alcohol Abuse (total) <sup>g</sup>	8.92 (7.83)	10.18 (8.98)	.471	.639
<b>Problems related to alcohol use</b>	<b>3.23 (2.98)</b>	<b>16.38 (35.16)</b>	<b>-2.427</b>	<b>.019</b>
Drug use <sup>h</sup>	2.09 (3.14)	1.84 (2.02)	.334	.739
<b>Alcohol / drug consumption with sexual clients</b>	<b>11.06 (23.31)</b>	<b>76.33 (134.36)</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.002</b>

Note: <sup>a</sup>STAI; 20 items with a 4-point Likert scale, <sup>b</sup>CES-D; 20 items with a 4-point Likert scale, <sup>c</sup>Suicidal Ideation Screener; 4 items with a 4-point Likert scale, <sup>d</sup>PID-5; 25 items with a 4-point Likert scale, <sup>e</sup>34 items 40 items with a 5-point Likert scale, <sup>f</sup>Berger; 40 items with a 4-point Likert scale, <sup>g</sup>AUDIT; 10 items with a 5-point Likert scale, <sup>h</sup>DAST-10; 10 items with a dichotomous scale.

TABLE 2. Bivariate logistic regression analyses

	Retained (n=50)		Not retained (n=11)		OR (95% CI)	p
	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Yes n(%)	No n(%)		
Foreign born	15 (30)	35 (70)	3 (27.3)	8 (72.7)	1.14 (.26 – 4.91)	.858
Less than high school	31 (62)	19 (38)	6 (54.5)	5 (45.5)	.73 (.19 – 2.74)	.648
Unstable housing	27 (54)	23 (46)	5 (45.5)	5 (45.5)	.85 (.21 – 3.31)	.817
Sex work (current)	39 (78)	11 (22)	8 (72.7)	3 (27.3)	1.33 (.30 – 5.87)	.707
Late diagnosis (CD4 <200)	9 (18)	41 (82)	3 (27.3)	8 (72.7)	.58 (.12 – 2.65)	.487
Arrested by police <sup>a</sup>	14 (28)	36 (72)	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	.46 (.12 – 1.77)	0.264
<b>Police harassment (last year)</b>	<b>6 (12)</b>	<b>44 (88)</b>	<b>5 (45.5)</b>	<b>6 (54.5)</b>	<b>.16 (.03 – .70)</b>	<b>.015</b>
Physical violence (last year)	23 (46)	27 (54)	4 (36.4)	7 (63.6)	1.49 (.38 – 5.74)	.562
Sexual assault (last year)	16 (32)	34 (68)	4 (36.4)	7 (63.6)	.82 (.21 – 3.22)	.780
Drug abuse (DAST score >4) <sup>a</sup>	9 (18)	41 (82)	3 (27.3)	8 (72.7)	.58 (.12 – 2.65)	.484
Hazardous drinking (AUDIT score >8) <sup>b</sup>	26 (52)	24 (48)	6 (54.5)	5 (45.5)	.90 (.24 – 3.34)	.878
Cocaine use (last year)	28 (56)	22 (44)	4 (36.4)	7 (63.6)	2.22 (.57 – 8.58)	.245

Note: <sup>a</sup>DAST-10; 10 items with a dichotomous scale, <sup>b</sup>AUDIT; 10 items with a 5-point Likert scale.