

RAP* Time



RURAL CENTER *for* AIDS/STD PREVENTION

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“On the down low” men having sex with men had greater HIV risk with female partners

Men “on the down low” who have sex with other men (DL MSM) have received increasing attention in the media. Currently, DL-MSM is characterized as Black, non-identify as gay, having sex with both genders, not disclosing their sexual behavior with men to women, and inadequate condom use. However, this characterization is more based on anecdotal reports and external labels, than on data and self-defined identities. The lack of data contributes to much of the divisive nature of discourse about DL MSM.

This exploratory study compared MSM who considered themselves to be on the DL with MSM who did not.

Methodology

Convenience samples of DL MSM and non-DL MSM were recruited from 12 cities in the northeastern, mid-western, and western regions of the United States from June to September 2004 as part of a larger study evaluating HIV prevention messages for MSM.

Data pertaining to racial identity, sexual identity, sexual practices, and participant characteristics were obtained. All data were

collected using audio computer-assisted self interview. Self-identification was used to identify DL MSM.

Outcomes of the Study

455 men participated; by design, one-third were each Black, Hispanic, and White. Mean age was 35 and most had some college education. 20% identified as DL.

Major findings include:

- Blacks and Hispanics were more likely than Whites to self-identify as DL.
- MSM who did not identify as gay were more likely than gay-identified MSM to describe themselves as DL.
- DL-identified MSM were less likely to have had seven or more male partners in the prior 30 days, but were more likely to have had a female partner and to have had unprotected vaginal sex.
- DL-identified MSM were less likely to have ever been tested for HIV than were non-DL.
- DL-identified MSM were at greater risk than non-DL MSM for acquiring HIV from, or transmitting it to, female partners.
- Few DL-identified MSM had a female main partner, but two-thirds of those who did indicated

that she did not know about their sexual encounters with men.

- Differences in sexual behaviors with male partners were not found between DL-identified and non-DL identified MSM. But, DL-identified MSM were more likely to report unprotected anal sex with male and female partners who HIV status they did not know.

Implications for Prevention

This study found that some self-identified MSM “on the down low” are at risk for either acquiring or transmitting HIV with female partners -- a risk greater than non-DL MSM. This information is valuable in furthering the recognition of this problem among public health officials. Even though some DL MSM are being reached, increased efforts are needed to motivate this population to adopt and maintain effective HIV risk reduction strategies.

SOURCE:

Wolitski, R. J., et. al. (2006). Self-identified as “down low” among men who have sex with men (MSM) from 12 US cities. *AIDS and Behavior*, 10, 519-529.

Unprotected sex high for teens with main and casual partners

Because of the high prevalence of STIs among adolescents, the examination of factors that contribute to HIV transmission is a priority. This study examined adolescents' behaviors and attitudes toward condom use with "casual" and "main" sexual partners. Participants were 1316 adolescents, aged 15-21 years, in three major U.S. cities.

Adolescents with main partners only were more likely to be female; males were more likely to report casual partners. Race/ethnicity, age, education level, household income, and STI history were unrelated to sexual partner type. Greater substance use and riskier attitudes were reported by teens in the causal partner group.

The number of unprotected sexual behaviors in the past 90 days was substantial and equivalent between the main and casual partner group.

Adolescents with casual and main sexual partners may be at continued risk for STIs given their high rates of unprotected sex.

SOURCE: Lescano, C. M., et al. (2006). Condom use with "casual" and "main" partners: What's in a name? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39, 443.e1-443.e7.

Situational cannabis-use did not increase sexual risk behavior

The impact of situational cannabis-use among young men and women has not been adequately examined. This study investigated to what extent are drug effects on sexual risk behavior due to the immediate, situational use of cannabis. Participants were a random sample of 2790 men and women aged 16-24 years interviewed by a computer-assisted telephone.

Risky sexual behavior was more frequent in cannabis-using men and women than non-using participants. However, this association was not supported in event-level analyses. The situational influence of cannabis did not increase sexual risk behavior among young men and women of the study.

Cannabis users had decreased intentions to use HIV protection, lower self-efficacy, and a more hedonistic and risky lifestyle, leading to more risky sexual behavior.

The findings indicate that HIV prevention programs for cannabis-using young adults -- men and women -- should emphasize the role of person variables instead of situational variable.

SOURCE: Brodbeck, J., et al. (2006). Association between cannabis use and sexual risk behavior among young heterosexual adults. *AIDS and Behavior*, 10, 599-605.

Opportunistic disease in children not common in HAART era

Pre-HAART and HAART HIV-infected children were compared on 29 targeted infections. Opportunistic and other related infections were found to be uncommon in children in the HAART era, and infection rates continue to be lower than those reported in the pre-HAART era. However, despite current advances due to HAART, some children continue to develop opportunistic infections.

SOURCE: Philimon, G., et al. (2006). Incidence of opportunistic and other infections in HIV-infected children in the HAART era. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 296, 292-300.

Wasting rare among teen boys and girls

Significant differences in body composition were found between teen 137 boys and 382 girls infected with HIV. But, wasting was rare. Higher testosterone levels (within normal level) were related to greater fat and lean body mass.

SOURCE: Moscicki, A., et al. (2006). Associations among body composition, androgen levels, and human immunodeficiency virus status in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39, 164-173.

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The opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the cooperating universities.

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