

Similar Sexual Behaviours with Casual Partners among Gay Men With and Without A Regular Partner

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Background

- Some men in relationships have unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) with *casual* partners -- may lead to HIV acquisition and subsequent infection of *regular* partner^{1,2}
- Therefore examining sexual behaviours with *casual* partners among men in relationships has important public health implications
- Few studies have directly compared sexual behaviours with *casual* partners reported by men in *regular* partnerships with those reported by men who have only *casual* partners over time^{3,4,5}

Objectives

- We wanted to compare men in and out of relationships
- We hypothesized that men in *regular* partnerships would engage in less risky sexual behaviours with their *casual* partners than men who report having casual partners only

Methods

- Cross-sectional data were collected between 1999 and 2003 in a study of young HIV-seronegative gay men in Vancouver, British Columbia
- Eligible participants are between 15 and 30 years of age, live in greater Vancouver, have never previously tested HIV-positive, and self-identify as gay or bisexual or as having ever had sex with a man.
- At baseline and annually thereafter, subjects provide blood samples and complete self-administered questionnaires that elicit demographic information and information pertaining to sexual and substance use behaviours
- We restricted our analyses of sexual and substance use behaviours to 2 groups: 1) men reporting a single *regular* partnership and one or more casual partnerships and 2) men reporting only *casual* partnerships
- **“Regular” partnership defined as “the guy you have had sex with on a regular basis, at least once a month, during more than one of the last 12 months”**
- **“Casual” partner defined as “guys you had sex with less than once a month (including one night stands)”**
- Comparison of men with and without a regular partner performed using Pearson’s Chi-square and Wilcoxon rank sum tests
- Odds ratios computed using logistic regression used to measure associations between having a regular partner and sexual behaviours engaged in with casual partners and to measure association between behaviours engaged in with casual and regular partners in an analysis restricted to men with a regular partner

Results

- Among the 156 eligible participants: median age was 30 (IQR 26-33), 109 (71%) were white, 151 (97%) reported stable housing, 88 (61%) were college-educated, 90 (58%) were employed full-time, 124 (89%) reported earning >\$10,000 (CDN), 43 (28%) reported having just one regular partner for at least one year and 113 (72%) reported having no regular partners during the previous year.
- Men with a regular partner more likely to report having engaged during the previous year in any UR/IAI (84% versus 42%; $p < 0.01$), any URAI (72% versus 33%; $p < 0.01$); and any UIAI (72% versus 41%; $p < 0.01$)
- Men with regular partner had fewer casual partners than men with no regular partner (median 3 vs. 6; $p = 0.07$)
- **Men with regular partner not different from men without regular partner with respect to sexual behaviours reportedly engaged in with casual partners (see Table 1)**
- Only previous use of poppers ($p = 0.039$) and higher frequencies of marijuana use ($p = 0.050$) were found among men without a regular partner
- **In analysis restricted to men with regular partner, positive but non-significant associations observed between behaviors engaged in with regular and casual partners (see Table 2)**
- Unfortunately, our sample size was too small to make comparisons between men who report any UAI with at least one casual partner and those who do not report any such behaviour among *only* men in a regular partnership

Table I: Anal intercourse with casual partners reported by HIV-negative young MSM with one versus no regular partner.

Characteristic	One regular partner ^a (n= 43) n (%)	No regular partner (n= 113) n (%)	Age-adjusted Odds Ratio (95% CI)	p- value
Any receptive anal sex	21 (49)	61 (54)	0.8 (0.40 – 1.64)	0.56
Any unprotected receptive anal sex	6 (14)	20 (18)	0.8 (0.28 – 2.05)	0.58
Any insertive anal sex	23 (53)	78 (69)	0.5 (0.25 – 1.06)	0.07
Any unprotected insertive anal sex	13 (30)	32 (28)	1.1 (0.51 – 2.37)	0.81
Any insertive or receptive anal sex	29 (67)	89 (79)	0.6 (0.26 – 1.22)	0.14
Any unprotected insertive or receptive anal sex	15 (35)	37 (33)	1.1 (0.53 – 2.31)	0.80

Note: ^a included men reporting at least one year duration of relationship.

Table II: Relation between anal intercourse practices engaged in with regular versus casual partners reported by 43 men who have one regular partner.

Characteristic	Regular and casual partners n (%)	Regular partner only n (%)	Casual partner only n (%)	Neither regular nor casual partners n (%)	Age-adjusted Odds Ratio (95% CI)	p- value
Any receptive anal sex	19 (44)	17 (40)	2 (5)	5 (12)	2.4 (0.39 – 14.36)	0.35
Any unprotected receptive anal sex	4 (9)	25 (58)	2 (5)	12 (28)	1.3 (0.19 – 9.12)	0.79
Any insertive anal sex	18 (42)	17 (40)	5 (12)	3 (7)	0.6 (0.11 – 2.91)	0.50
Any unprotected insertive anal sex	10 (23)	18 (42)	3 (7)	12 (28)	2.4 (0.53 – 11.08)	0.25
Any anal sex	27 (63)	14 (33)	2 (5)	0 (0)	undefined	0.97
Any unprotected anal sex	12 (28)	21 (49)	3 (7)	7 (16)	1.7 (0.32 – 8.60)	0.55

Conclusions

- In our cohort, young gay men in a relationship do not appear less likely to engage in risky sex with casual partners than men with casual partners only
- These results could reflect an increase in unprotected anal intercourse and are consistent with findings of increasing risk of HIV acquisition from regular partners
- Interventions specifically targeting men in relationships should address sexual risk reduction with casual as well as regular partners and promote safer norms

References

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