

Loneliness, Social Support, and Sexual Health Behaviours Among Gay, Bisexual, and Other Men who Have Sex with Men (GBM).

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Introduction

- Members of sexual minority groups, like GBM, are more likely to experience social rejection, leading to feelings of isolation, loneliness and lower social support (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Ueno, 2005; Williams et al., 2005).
- Social isolation can be more severe among those who are not “out” in all their social circles, due to a lower sense of community belongingness (Chaney & Dew, 2003; Guigliamo, 2006)
- Sexual behaviour is often used to alleviate the emotional discomfort of loneliness (Torres & Gore-Felton, 2007).
- The goal of this study was to understand how loneliness relates to social supports and condom use.

Methods

- The Momentum Health Study is a cohort study of gay men, aged 16+ in Metro Vancouver, recruited using responded-driven sampling between Feb 2012 and Feb 2015. Study visits continued every 6 months, with data cut for this analysis from the baseline sample (visit 1).
- Participants completed computer-assisted self-interviews that assessed sexual behaviour and loneliness.
- Analytic Sample:
 - N = 774
 - Median age: 34 years
 - 75.5% identified as White, 9.6% as Asian, 6.5% Indigenous, 4.5% Latino
 - 28.4% HIV-positive
- We examined demographic and sexual behaviour factors associated with loneliness scores using multivariable linear regression, applying RDS weights.

Key Take-Aways:

- GBM who are LESS lonely are MORE likely to use condoms when having receptive anal sex.
- GBM who are “Out” tend to experience LESS loneliness.
- GBM who report MORE social support also report LESS loneliness.

Results:

Higher Loneliness Scores were Associated with:	Estimate	95% CI		p-value
LOWER Social Support Scale Scores	-.32	-0.35	-0.28	<.001
GREATER Number of Male Sex Partners in the past 6 months	.01	0.00	0.01	.009
Being "out" (gay men only)				
No/Still coming out	Ref			
LOWER likelihood of saying “Yes” to being “Out”	-.97	-1.37	-0.57	<.001
Condom Used during Anal Sex				
Ever	Ref			
GREATER likelihood of Never using condoms	.54	0.16	0.92	.005
P6M Group Sex Condom Use Frequency - Receptive Anal Sex (only if participated in group sex)				
Ever	Ref			
GREATER likelihood of Never using condoms	.97	0.11	1.83	.027
No group sex in past 6 months	N/A			
P6M Group Sex Condom Use Frequency - Insertive Anal Sex (only if participated in group sex)				
Ever	Ref			
No Significant Association with Never using condoms	-.39	-1.14	0.36	.309
No group sex in past 6 months	N/A			

Conclusions

- Our results support the inverse link between social supports and loneliness among GBM.
- Loneliness was also associated with condoms anal sex and having more sexual partners.
- These findings suggest that interventions that help lonely GBM develop strategies to adaptively cope with their feelings of loneliness may also lead to reductions STI/HIV transmission.
- Note that these data were collected before PrEP was widely available in Canada; our future work will examine how the availability of PrEP has impacted the strategies lonely GBM use to protect their sexual health.*

Further information

Dr. Shayna Skakoon-Sparling is supported by a CTN Postdoctoral Fellowship, she has no conflicts of interest to declare and can be contacted at: S.Sparling@Ryerson.Ca

