**COMMUNITY MAPPING AND RESPONDENT DRIVEN SAMPLING (RDS) AMONG GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN IN VANCOUVER, CANADA**

**Importance of this study**
- *Respondent Driven Sampling* (RDS) is an important method for reaching ‘hard-to-reach’ populations such as men who have sex with men (MSM)
- *Formative research* is recommended before implementing an RDS study to define the population of interest, and understand its characteristics and means of access.
- There is no consensus on the most effective qualitative methodologies for conducting formative research
- This study demonstrated how community mapping can be used to identify underlying social network structures and aid in the implementation of RDS

**What is an effective method to understand gay men’s social networks prior to the implementation of an RDS study?**

**Community mapping is an effective formative research methodology for guiding the implementation of RDS among gay and bisexual men.**

**How this study was conducted**
- Local community-based organizations were used to recruit community members into 6 Focus Group Discussions and 24 Key Informant Interviews
- Individual community maps were created by participants to conceptualize local social-sexual networks in Vancouver, BC

**What the study found**
- Despite the growing use of online networks for gay men to connect, physical spaces are still important factors that structure men’s social networks
- Gay men’s social networks are demographically diverse, with overlap between various sub-groups
  - Substance use preferences differentiate distinct sub-communities of gay and bisexual men in Vancouver

**What this means**
- Community mapping is an effective qualitative formative research tool to shed light on underlying network structures and attributes of gay and bisexual men, particularly in urban settings.
- Use of flexible study participation incentives, social media and electronic recruitment strategies, and monitoring of substance use and sexual-social identities are important applications of the rich data community mapping can provide to the implementation of RDS studies among gay and bisexual men.


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