

Does Age Matter? Sexual Event-Level Analysis of Age-Disparate Sexual Partners among Gay, Bisexual and other Men who Have Sex with Men in Vancouver, Canada

What are the sexual health implications associated with having older or younger partners?

What is the importance of this study?

- In Vancouver, one in five gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM) live with HIV, with increasing prevalence by increasing age.
- There is a gap in knowledge and understanding of the sexual health implications of intergenerational relationships, which are relationships with a significant age difference between partners.

FACT BOX

Intergenerational sexual relationships may be significant contributors to HIV transmission.

How was this study conducted?

- Via a computer questionnaire, individuals were asked the approximate age difference between themselves and their last five sexual partners.
- Participants were also asked details of the last sexual encounter they had with each of these partners.
- Partners were reported as being 'much older', 'older', 'same age', 'younger', or 'much younger'.

What are the key study findings?

- A minority of sexual events was reported with much older or much younger partners (13.7%).
- Younger HIV-positive GBM and older HIV-negative GBM are more likely to have partners who are much older or much younger, respectively.
- Compared with men with sexual partners about the same age as themselves, men reporting younger partners are more likely to have higher incomes and to have met their partner online.
- Men with older partners are more likely to identify as gay; identify as Latino or Asian; have received money, drugs, or goods for sex; report condomless insertive anal intercourse with an unknown or serodiscordant partner, versus condom-protected; and be less likely to report use of alcohol or erectile dysfunction drugs (while their partners were more likely to report using erectile dysfunction drugs).



What do these findings mean?

- Respondents with older partners are more likely to report sexual encounters with greater potential for HIV transmission (e.g., condomless insertive anal sex).
- However, caution should be taken in framing these relationships as 'risky'.
- Increased efforts are needed to reduce the stigma surrounding relationships with large age differences, and to promote positive and safer sexual relationships between younger and older GBM.

What is the BC-CfE Momentum Health Study?

Evidence from British Columbia and elsewhere has demonstrated the expansion of access to antiretroviral HIV treatment (ART) can result in population-level reductions in HIV incidence. This is the concept behind the made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention[®] strategy, or TasP[®], which aims to expand early HIV testing and treatment to improve patients' health and curb the spread of HIV. Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM) represent the most affected HIV risk group, both in BC and Canada. The BC-CfE Momentum Health Study is designed to measure changes in HIV risk behaviour, attitudes toward TasP[®] and the proportion of HIV-positive GBM with unsuppressed viral load over time in the Vancouver region. The study uses respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to obtain a more representative sample reflecting the diversity of the GBM population in Vancouver.

Full paper available online: <http://sti.bmj.com/content/early/2016/11/16/sextrans-2016-052721>

Citation: Closson K, Lachowsky NJ, Cui Z, Shurgold S, Sereda P, Rich A, Moore DM, Roth EA, Hogg RS. Does age matter? Sexual event-level analysis of age-disparate sexual partners among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM) in Vancouver, Canada. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*. 2016 Nov 16;sextrans-2016-052721



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