

GAY MEN'S RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENTS IN THE ERA OF PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS: AN ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN BEHAVIOURAL SURVEILLANCE DATA

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Background: Gay and bisexual men (GBM) in HIV-negative seroconcordant relationships have commonly had relationship agreements that allowed condomless sex within the relationships, but not with casual sex partners ('negotiated safety'). Growing numbers of GBM are, however, adopting biomedical prevention strategies (such as PrEP) in place of consistent condom use. This might reshape GBM's relationship agreements, including negotiated safety.

Methods: Community-based, cross-sectional surveys of adult men were conducted across Australia during 2013–2018. 46,291 GBM completed the surveys. We report trends in relationship agreements and casual sex among HIV-negative and untested GBM who had regular partners ($n=20,277$) during 2013–2018. We used binary logistic regression to test trends and cross-sectional analysis to examine recent practice.

Results: Agreements that allowed condomless anal intercourse with casual partners (CAIC) increased from 2.4% in 2013 to 11.3% in 2018 ($p<.001$). This increase was accompanied by decreases in agreements that anal sex with casual partners must be with a condom (27.5% in 2013 to 21.6% in 2018, $p<.001$), and agreements that no sex was allowed with casual partners (34.1% in 2013 to 31.4% in 2018, $p<.001$). The proportion of men reporting any casual sex remained relatively stable at around 40%; however, the proportion of men reporting recent CAIC nearly doubled from 13.5% in 2013 to 26.3% in 2018 ($p<.001$). In recent years (2016–2018), greater numbers of PrEP users in relationships engaged in CAIC compared to non-users in relationships (over 40% of whom had an agreement that permitted this); however, a further 32% of PrEP users ($n=616$) reported CAIC without an agreement, while 13% of non-PrEP-users ($n=3,168$) also reported CAIC without an agreement.

Conclusion: The relationship agreements of GBM appear to have rapidly evolved in response to the introduction of PrEP. Our findings show a shift away from relationship agreements in which condomless sex is only permitted between regular partners.

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