

# **BREAKING-UP AND GETTING BACK TOGETHER: PATTERNS OF INTIMACY WITHIN ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND WITHOUT BACTERIAL STI DIAGNOSIS**

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**BACKGROUND:** Decreased feelings of intimacy predict bacterial sexually transmitted infections (STI) among adolescent young women. We have limited understanding of the impact of STI on stability or feelings of intimacy within the relationship. The current study objectives were to examine frequency and duration of break-ups within relationships, characterize feelings of intimacy before compared to after the break-up, and to examine whether these differ for those with and without STI diagnosis.

**METHODS:** A cohort of females (N=122), aged 16-19, recruited from health clinics in Baltimore, Maryland completed daily surveys for 12 months. Participants reported daily on partner-specific feelings of trust, closeness, and commitment. Vaginal swabs were tested for *Chlamydia trachomatis* and *Neisseria gonorrhoea* every 3 months. Break-up was coded as absent report of partner. Back-together was coded when partner reappeared. Robust standard errors were used to account for correlation among repeated intervals within relationships.

**RESULTS:** 16% had a positive STI. A higher percent of relationships without STI diagnosis got back together following a break-up compared to those with an STI diagnosis (39.9% vs. 21.7%, respectively). There was no significant difference in duration of break-up for those with and without an STI (21.7 vs. 24.5 days, respectively). Average feelings of intimacy were the same when back-together for both those with and without an STI diagnosis; however, mean levels of intimacy were lower for those with compared to those without an STI across all measures of intimacy.

**CONCLUSION:** In communities where adolescents perceive low partner availability, relationships with STI diagnosis look similar to those without STI, particularly with respect to feelings. The next generation of behavioral interventions should consider strategies that leverage positive relationship qualities and engage dyads to prevent repeat infections.