

INCREASING THE GENDER AND SEXUALITY INCLUSIVITY OF A GAY MEN'S SURVEY TO IDENTIFY NEW SEXUAL PRACTICES, HIV RISKS, AND MAINTAIN COMMUNITY SUPPORT: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Background:

Since 1996, the Gay Community Periodic Surveys (GCPS) have formed a key part of Australia's behavioural surveillance system for HIV, sexual health, and drug use. Following critical feedback from bi+ and trans communities, the GCPS was rebranded in 2024 as the GBQ+ Community Periodic Surveys, with redesigned questions to better reflect gender and sexuality diversity amongst previous and future respondents.

Methods:

We undertook a mixed method research study to lead and capture the redesign process. In 2023 we consulted the national GCPS advisory group multiple times, undertook cognitive interviewing with 30 gay, bi+, and queer men (cis and trans) and non-binary people on a proposed version of the questionnaire, to assess acceptability and comprehension. In January 2024, rapid field interviews (n=39) were undertaken with participants completing the new questionnaire during recruitment in Melbourne.

Results:

Consultation with the advisory group led to questionnaire redesign involving the adoption of gender-neutral language, a shift from an exclusive focus on anal sex, an increase in questions about sex with female partners, and new questions about non-binary partners. Cognitive interviewing prompted refinements, including more inclusive wording of answer options (e.g. "Another term" rather than "Other"), and better recognition of non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships. Some trans men and non-binary participants indicated that while more inclusive, the questionnaire implied an overly cisgender and binary conceptualisation of men. Field interview participants were either largely positive or did not notice the questionnaire changes, suggesting high acceptability.

Conclusion:

The new questionnaire captures a broader range of sexual practices, and can identify HIV risks in new subgroups of GBQ men and non-binary people. Collected data will require careful assessment, particularly when comparing to past indicators. This successful redesign process conducted in collaboration with community members and stakeholders could be adapted to other repeated, longitudinal, and/or paper-based questionnaires to improve inclusivity.

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