

Understanding how young cisgender heterosexual men in Australia navigate conversations about sexual health and contraceptive use in casual sex

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Background: It is well established that young cisgender heterosexual men in Australia are the least likely population group to undergo STI testing and ensuring barrier method use during casual sex with cisgender women who have sex with men, with rates of STIs increasing among this group. This research examines how these men navigate conversations during casual sexual encounters and their sexual health more broadly in a post #metoo environment, and what this means for future sexual health promotion initiatives.

Methods: 30 semi-structured interviews with young cisgender heterosexual men living in Australia were conducted. Participants were asked questions about their dating and sexual practices, including sexual health knowledge, how they learned to have sex, and navigating sexual health conversations with partners, such as STI testing and barrier method and hormonal contraceptive use. Findings were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques.

Results: Findings show that young cisgender heterosexual men do not discuss sexual health concerns or contraceptive use, with casual partners, and continue to assume that women are responsible for contraception. They also continue to forgo regular STI testing due to barriers accessing confidential services. Participants were hesitant about whether they would use (hypothetical) male forms of the birth control pill, while some were unaware of STIs such as HPV and its impacts on women. Some participants were willing to risk unplanned pregnancy or trusted hormonal methods rather than use condoms during casual sex.

Conclusion: This research highlights that, despite increased awareness and promotion of STI prevention and contraceptive responsibility, young cisgender heterosexual men continue to forgo their responsibilities regarding their own and other's sexual health during casual sexual encounters, and lack adequate communication skills in navigating sexual health conversations with potential partners.

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