

MAKING CHOICES ABOUT SEXUAL PARTNERS BASED ON HIV STATUS AMONG HIV-NEGATIVE AUSTRALIAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN

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Background: HIV-negative gay and bisexual men (GBM) have been found to tend to avoid sex with HIV-positive men, even if they are taking HIV treatments thereby minimising the possibility of onward transmission. We investigated men's preferences about sex with HIV-positive men.

Methods: In late 2016, 1702 non HIV-positive GBM completed an online survey about sexual partnering.

Results: Mean age was 34.8 years. In the previous six months, 30.1% reported condomless anal intercourse with casual partners (CLAIC). Whereas most men found HIV-negative partners attractive (96.7%), only 11.9% found HIV-positive men attractive, although this increased to 40.2% if they knew he was on HIV treatment. In multivariate analysis, not being attracted to HIV-positive men on treatment was associated with: younger age (aOR=0.98; 95%CI=0.98-0.99), internalised homophobia (aOR=1.02; 95%CI=1.01-1.03), and lower social engagement with gay men (aOR=0.82; 95%CI=0.76-0.89).

63 participants described a recent casual sex encounter with an HIV-positive partner who was on treatment, and 769 with an HIV-negative partner. Participants were no less likely to engage in CLAIC with these HIV-positive (50.8%) than with the HIV-negative (36.9%) partners. Sexual position during CLAIC was unaffected by partners' HIV status on this occasion. Level of enjoyment of the sexual encounter was similar with both HIV-positive and HIV-negative partners.

Conclusion: Many men indicated that they found HIV-positive men 'unattractive', and for almost half that was still the case if the HIV-positive man was on treatment. Younger men, those less connected to gay community, and those with some evidence of internalised homophobia were more likely to express reservations about sex with HIV-positive men. However, among men who did have sexual experiences with HIV-positive men, there was little difference in either their sexual behaviour or their enjoyment of that experience. Although most non HIV-positive GBM reject HIV-positive men as sex partners, a minority do not.

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