

The Power of Peers:

evaluating the effectiveness of peer-led HIV and sexual health education workshops for gay, bisexual, queer, and other men who have sex with men

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Ethical approval: Human Research Ethics Committee of UNSW Sydney (iRECS6911)





The Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney is located on the Traditional Lands of the Bidjigal peoples.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and First Nations people's continuing connection to culture, land, sea, waters, and community.

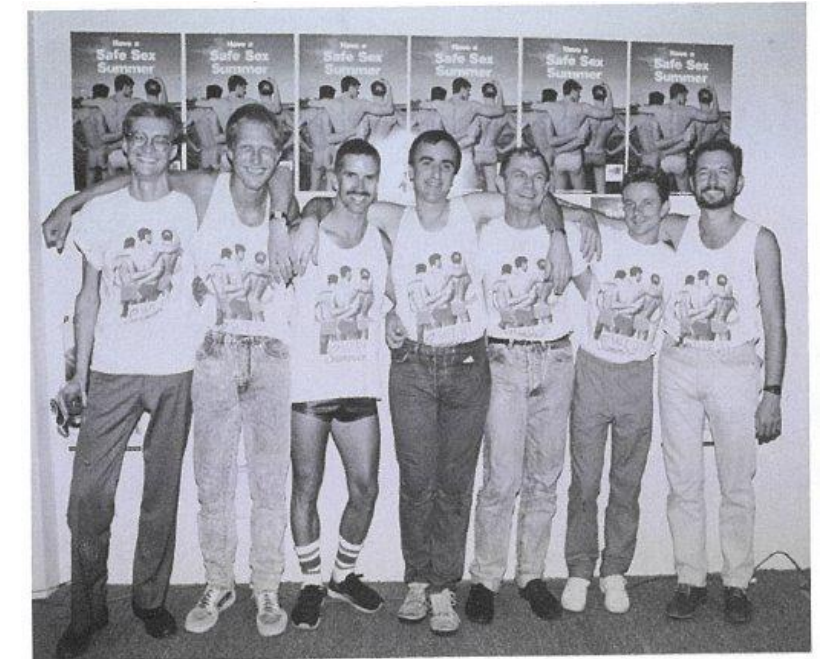
We pay our respects to Elders, both past and present.

Disclosure of interest

- None

ACON Peer Education

- ACON is New South Wales' leading LGBTQ+ health organisation, established in 1985 in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Peer Education programs began in 1988, to support gay, bi+, and queer men aged 18+.
- The foundational model was built on principles of community grounding, Person-centred, shared lived experience and non-judgmental support.
- Peer Education has evolved into a state-wide model across multiple ACON projects to meet the needs of First Nations, multicultural and regional communities, LGBTQ+ women, trans and gender diverse people, and those living with HIV.
- When developing or tailoring workshops for specific community groups, ACON adopts a consultative approach that centres lived experience and community values.



Aim

- To explore the impact of ACON's peer education programs on community members':
 - HIV & sexual health knowledge
 - Confidence communicating for safer-sex practices
 - Connection to LGBTQ+ community



Bavinton et al, 2013

Article

Sexual Health

Assessing the effectiveness of HIV prevention peer education workshops for gay men in community settings

Benjamin R. Bavinton

The Kirby Institute for Infection and Immunity in Society, The University of New South Wales

James Gray

ACON (the AIDS Council of New South Wales)

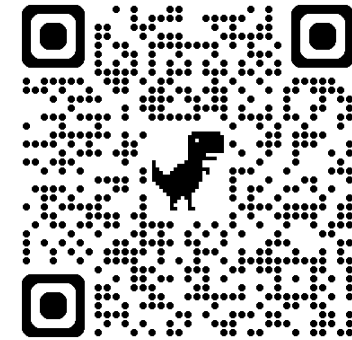
Garrett Prestage

The Kirby Institute for Infection and Immunity in Society, The University of New South Wales; Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Victoria

Abstract

Objective: To use existing evaluation data of community-based HIV prevention peer education workshops (PEWs) for gay men to explore the challenges in evaluating such programs in community settings.

Methods: Data came from 33 PEWs conducted with gay and bisexual men. A basic pre/post-test design was used to measure sexual health capacity. The Sexual Health Capacity Scale (SHCS) was anonymously completed before participation and twice afterward, with the men measuring perceptions of themselves



Bavinton, B.R., Gray, J. and Prestage, G. (2013), Assessing the effectiveness of HIV prevention peer education workshops for gay men in community settings. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 37: 305-310. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12076>

Methods

- De-identified data from 2019-2024
- Pre/post workshop evaluation data



Demographics

- Age
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status
- Sexuality
- Gender
- HIV status
- Country of birth
- Cultural background
- Postcode
- Languages spoken
- Visa status

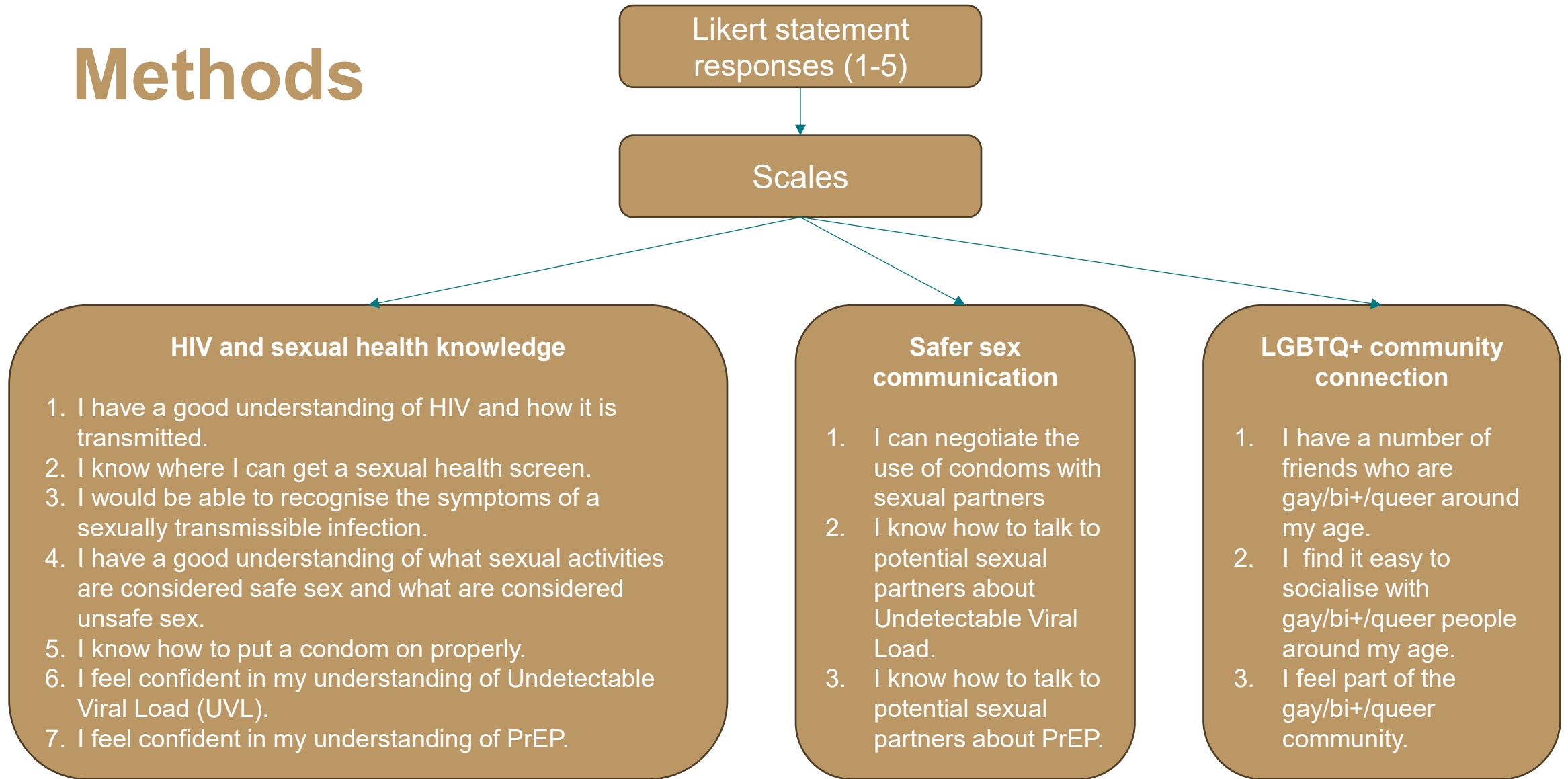
Workshop characteristics

- Date held
- Workshop Type
 - Youth: Adult Themes, Start Making Sense, Starting Out West
 - All-ages: Booty Basics, Looking 4 Mr Right, Start Making Sense – Middle Eastern Men

Likert statement responses (1-5)

- 25 items across 6 workshop types
- HIV & STIs
 - Healthcare access
 - Safer sex, STI risk
 - LGBTQ+ community connection
 - Workshop-specific content

Methods



Methods

- Tabulated demographic data
- Bivariable and multivariate models were used to compare:
 - Comparison of scale scores who completed both pre and post evaluations (paired samples t-test, bivariate and multivariate linear regression)
 - Completed pre only vs completed pre and post (bivariate and multivariate logistic regression)

Findings – Participant demographics

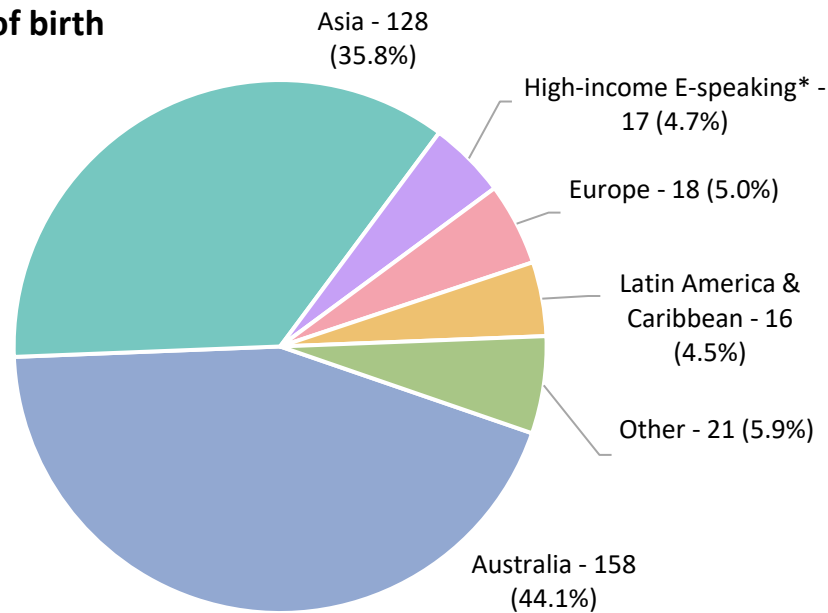
- 358 participants across 44 workshops had complete demographic and pre-workshop evaluation data

Variable	n (%)
Age*	34 (10)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	4 (1.1%)
Male (cis and trans)	346 (96.6%)
Transgender	11 (3.1%)
Sexual identity	
• Gay	295 (82.4%)
• Bi+	19 (5.3%)
• Queer	13 (3.6%)
• Other	31 (8.7%)
People living with HIV	19 (5.3%)

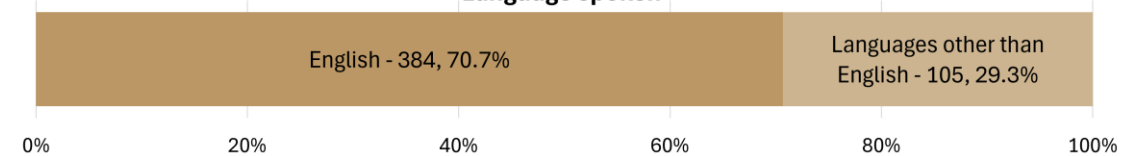
*mean (standard deviation)

Findings – Participant demographics

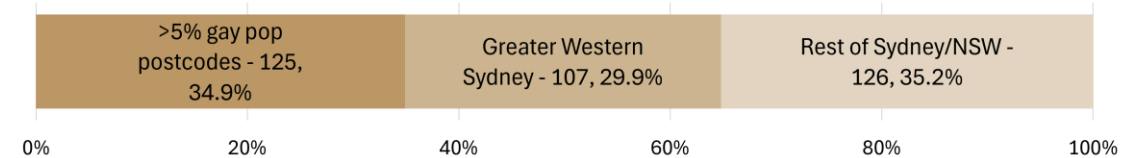
Region of birth



Language spoken



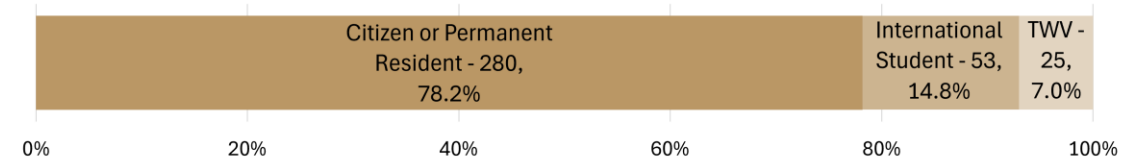
Postcode#



Cultural background



Visa status



Findings

- Of the 358 participants, 231 (65%) completed both pre- and post-workshop evaluation forms.
 - No significant demographic differences between those who only completed pre-workshop vs pre- and post-workshop evaluations
- Participants reported a significant increase in all scale measures

Scale	Before m(SD)	After m(SD)	P-value
HIV and sexual health knowledge	4.12 (0.73)	4.58 (0.50)	<0.001
Communicating for safer-sex	3.99 (0.77)	4.51 (0.60)	<0.001
LGBTQ+ community connection	3.43 (1.01)	4.05 (0.81)	<0.001

Findings

HIV and sexual health knowledge correlates:

- Slightly larger increase:
 - Born in Asia compared to Australian-born participants (Coeff=0.19, 95%CI=0.00–0.37, $p=0.044$)
 - Attended youth (18-26y/o) workshops compared to all-ages (18+y/o) workshops (Coeff=0.24, 95%CI=0.01–0.47, $p=0.043$).
- Slightly smaller increase:
 - Those speaking languages other than English compared to English-only speaking participants (Coeff=-0.21, 95%CI=-0.38–0.03, $p=0.019$).

Findings

Communicating for safer-sex correlates:

- No significant differences in increases

LGBTQ+ community connection correlates:

- Larger increase:
 - Born in Africa, Middle East, or Pacific Islands compared to Australian-born participants (Coeff=0.45, 95%CI=0.00–0.90, $p=0.050$)
 - On a temporary visa compared to citizens/permanent residents (Coeff=0.25, 95%CI=0.00–0.50, $p=0.049$).

Strengths and limitations

- Additional data collected compared to 2013 evaluation
- Data linkage
 - Enabled more rigorous analyses
 - Track change over time
 - Participant data were not deidentified when viewed by ACON staff; facilitators did not have access to evaluation data
- Self-reported measures, social desirability bias
- Large sample of peer education workshop participants

Conclusion

- Peer education workshops are effective tool in the HIV response, delivering significant improvements in HIV knowledge, safer-sex communication, and community connection.
- Particularly for:
 - Young people
 - Overseas-born
 - Temporary visa holders
- Value in partnerships between community-led organisations and researchers to strengthen evaluation methodology

Thank you

- All of the volunteer facilitators of the peer education workshops, and participants
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