

HIV+ male injection drug users feel pressured to have sex: implications for prevention

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SUDIS Research Objectives

- Describe the sexual and drug-injection practices among HIV+ IDUs.
- Identify psychological, social and sexual contexts of HIV transmission risk among HIV+ IDUs.
- Identify feasible intervention strategies to promote safer sexual and drug use practices among HIV+ IDUs.

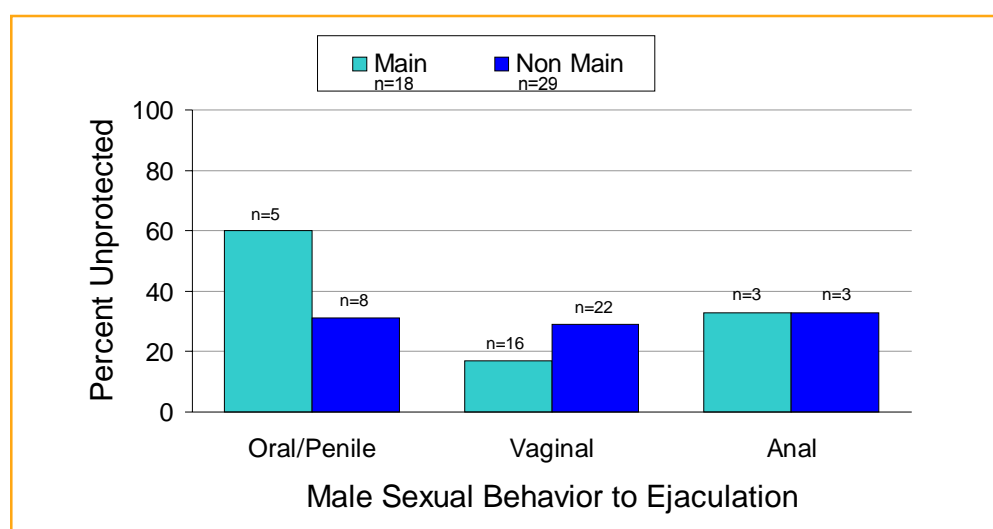
SUDIS Methods

- Cross-sectional study of 82 heterosexually active and currently injecting male HIV+ IDUs.
- IDUs were recruited from street locations and from AIDS Service Organizations.
- All participants received a semi-structured qualitative interview exploring HIV, sexual relationships and drug use practices, and an interviewer-administered survey.

Table 1. Male Demographic Characteristics (N=82)

City	
New York	51%
San Francisco	49%
Mean Age (±sd)	43±7
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	63%
Caucasian	27%
Latino	6%
Mixed Race/Other	4%
Education	
Less than High School graduate	33%
High School graduate/GED	38%
Some College/Technical School	26%
College graduate	2%
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	86%
Bisexual	10%
Homosexual/Gay	4%

Figure 1. Percent Unprotected Sex with Main and Non-main HIV-negative and Unknown Status Partners (Past 3 months)



Impact of HIV on male IDUs' social/sexual role

- High risk men's sexual development often occurred within the context of the drug/sex economy where being a "player" was the most valued role a man could occupy.
- An HIV diagnosis served as a disruption of this role and necessitated a sexual reinvention that was challenging for many men.
- HIV limited their ability to form meaningful relationships with women, due to fear of rejection upon disclosure and the emasculating effect of an HIV diagnosis.

"I've had sex [since HIV+]. No relationship. I had little flings goin' on, you know. Nothin' serious. I can't, you know... to be truthfully honest with you...I get a lotta action from women, and...because of this HIV virus, I have a lot of complexes of being, like, gettin' close to a woman now...That's one issue I haven't dealt with, but I know I'm a lonely person now. As far as [a] relationship goes. As far as havin' a partner...a woman to share everything with...behind the virus, I just don't want to make no total commitments with any woman any more...It's real sad."

Interventions for Seropositive Injectors: Research and Evaluation (INSPIRE)

- SUDIS qualitative findings have informed the development of a randomized control trial for HIV+ IDUs.

INSPIRE Study Goals

- Reduce HIV transmission to HIV uninfected sexual and drug use partners;
- Increase access to and use of HIV primary health care;
- Increase access and adherence to HIV treatments.

High-risk sexual contexts for HIV+ male IDUS

Drug/Sex Exchange Situations

- Many men reported "tossing up" women who came to them for drugs. Performing as the dominate sexual partner in these exchanges legitimized their social role as dealers and powerful men.

"That is... what I am payin' you for.' And then you show her, throw this crack on the side, and say, 'See these other big marbles? They're all yours.' I said, 'But every time you take a hit, your mouth better be busy, or your asshole, or one o' your holes better be open. And whatever go up in 'em, you better be thankful'."

- Men often devalued the women they had sex with in these situations to justify their unprotected behavior.

"The ones I know...I notified...to get tested, you know? And I know one girl came positive, but... she wasn't nothin' but a, a little tramp herself, so...she coulda gave it to ME...or, or she coulda got it from the street, you know what I mean?...Because...she was...as loose as they come."

- Men's ability to disclose their HIV status or insist on protected sex was inhibited by the sexual power dynamics of the relationship. Preservation of masculinity often took precedence over risk reduction.

"Because I...I really didn't want to do it [have sex], you know, she...insisted on it...you know how you got to be a man (chuckles). [She was] telling me that, I must be scared o' her now, or...you know, I ain't last now, and this an' that, you know...I done uh...changed up, 'cause I got a Mexican girlfriend now...[I said], 'Come on. We'll go, go through, I'll show you what I can do.'...And we got started. I was really glad my pager went off (chuckles)...Because I didn't really want to do it."

Intimate Serodiscordant Relationships

- Pressure from HIV negative partners to have unprotected sex was common in longer-term intimate relationships.

- Unprotected sex represented commitment and love in some serodiscordant relationships.

"I said... 'Lemme grab a condom out my bag.'...And she said, '[I'm] your wife. You don't need that thing.' I said, 'That's WHY I need it. You know? 'Cause you're my wife. You know, and I don't, I don't want to...get CLOSE to...givin' you this virus, you know?' (Pause). And uh...but we...I have did it...I have did it... about three times...without...[a] condom...[S]he love me just that much...that she would have sex with me without me havin' a condom."

- Women put pressure on their male HIV+ partners to have unprotected sex by insisting they were not at risk.

"I just ended up withdrawin' outta her, you know, and she's like, 'I can't get it, and you probably... you're just dormant, and it's just in you' and all that, but it still kinda messes with me, you know what I mean? And...it kinda, you know, fucks off my...performance, where I get off quicker...You know? [I am] really kinda nervous about it, you know what I'm sayin'?"

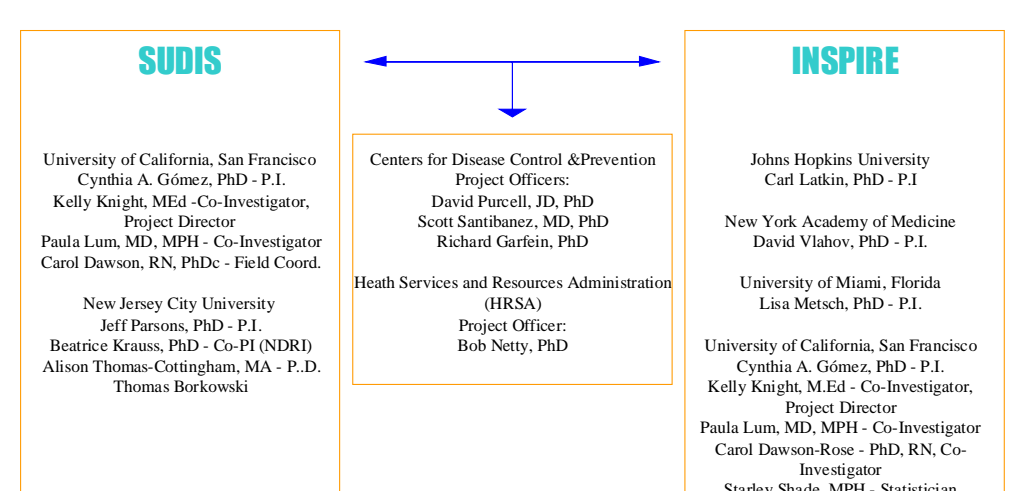
- Men struggled with sexual risk reduction choices and pressure from their partners to have unprotected sex.

"She acts like she's on a MISSION... to [get] the virus. She says everybody that's HIV or have AIDS is her people, you know? I guess because she's been around...speed freaks and drug users...And I asked her why, and she said, she don't care if she gets the virus. I tried to tell her that life has more meaning than that...But we had sex on several occasions, she's tellin' me, 'Well, why don't you come in my mouth'...when I did come in her [vagina] the first time...I cried like a baby, because I felt bad and stuff. But yet she knew I had it. And after that...we did have unprotected sex, and it was her choosin'...we wouldn't use a condom...I would make sure I pulled out first, but I know, still, you're takin' a chance. And like I said, for a long time...I wouldn't have sex with nobody. I just stayed celibate, period."

Intervention Implications

- Prevention interventions for HIV+ male IDUs should consider addressing the following issues:
 - The impact of HIV on the sexual/social roles of male IDUs.
 - Struggles with heterosexual male identity and gender role expectations in sexual situations.
 - The complex sexual dynamics of the drug/sex economy that contribute to transmission risk.
 - The impact of pressure for unprotected sex from HIV negative partners.
 - Skills building related to sexual communication, HIV responsibility, and risk reduction options within high risk contexts.

Collaborators



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