

Multilevel Factors Associated with Sexual Risk Behavior among Young Black Gay/Bisexual Men

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Background

- Young black gay and bisexual men (YBGBM) are group at highest risk for HIV in the U.S., with **rapidly** increasing incidence
- Purpose of this study: to examine if issues/variables at different levels are related to sexual risk behavior: structural/life context issues; cultural issues; social-interpersonal level; and individual-level variables
- Data from the baseline assessment of a randomized, controlled trial of a community-level HIV prevention intervention for YBGBM being conducted in Dallas & Houston, TX (*United Black Element*)

Methods

- Community mapping, via community interviews and ethnographic research, conducted in Dallas & Houston to identify venues where YBMSM congregate
- Conducted venue-based sampling at bars and clubs that cater to YBMSM
- Anonymous surveys administered March - June 2009.
- YBMSM completed self-administered surveys on hand-held devices (PDAs)
- Men paid \$30 for participating in the surveys
- Surveys took an average of 20-30 minutes to complete

Description of Sample

- N=666, 51% Dallas, 49% Houston
- Few differences between Houston & Dallas
- Men ranged from 18-29 years of age, mean=23 years
- 36% had UAI in the past 2 months
- 75% identified as gay or homosexual, 24% as bisexual, and 1% as something else
- 17% had less than a high school education
- 54% earned less than \$20,000 in past year
- 50% had to borrow money in the past year
- 33% had been incarcerated (jail, prison, juvenile hall)
- 13% had been homeless before (could be as adults or as children)

Psychosocial Scales

- Used to assess many psychosocial variables
- Used pre-existing scales & adapted them or developed new scales
- Conducted cognitive interviewing and focus groups to examine survey questions' meaning to men & revised accordingly
- After data collected, used factor analysis to determine different content areas
- All scales have minimum of 3 items, most have 4 - 7
- Alpha Cronbachs of scales all above .70, 3/4 are in .80+ range

Results

- Examined bivariate relationships between variables and if have had unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) with a man in past 2 months (t-tests & chi-squares)
- Recognize that ultimately want to look at multivariate analyses and casual modeling

Relationships Between UAI & Structural/Life Context Variables

<i>Variables</i>	No UAI (Mean or %)	Had UAI (Mean or %)	Sig.
Age	23.17	23.00	n.s.
Sexual Identity (gay/homosexual vs other)	% gay: 75.5%	% gay: 73.4%	n.s.
HIV status	% HIV-neg: 86.8%	% HIV-neg: 84.1%	n.s.
Education: (less than 12 th grade vs. 12 th grade or more)	% less than 12 th grade: 11.8%	% less than 12 th grade: 25.3%	***
Employment (less vs. full time)	% not FT: 43.6%	% not FT: 52.4%	*
Ran out of money past year (yes vs no)	% ran out: 49.3%	% ran out: 61.4%	**
Borrowed money past year (yes vs no)	% borrowed: 44.6%	% borrowed: 57.8%	**
Ever incarcerated (yes vs no)	% incarcerated: 29.9%	% incarcerated: 38.4%	*
Ever homeless (yes vs no)	% homeless: 8.9%	% homeless: 20.3%	***
Ever forced into sex (yes vs no)	% forced: 10.6%	% forced: 28.3%	***

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Relationships Between UAI & Cultural Variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Example of scale items</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>No UAI (Mean)</i>	<i>Had UAI (Mean)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Spiritual beliefs	<i>God gives meaning to my life.</i>	5 - 25	18.48	17.61	*
Beliefs that health is in God's hands	<i>God is in control of my health.</i>	6 - 36	23.05	22.61	n.s.
Frequency attended spiritual activities past year	(scale of freq)	3 - 18	9.83	9.80	n.s.
Conspiracy beliefs	<i>HIV medications are withheld from African Americans.</i>	5 - 25	12.60	12.27	n.s.

*p<.05

Relationships Between UAI & Social/Interpersonal Variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Example of scale items</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>No UAI (Mean or %)</i>	<i>Had UAI (Mean or %)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Has primary partner	[47% had boyfriend]		36.7%	65.2%	***
Social norms among YBMSM for safer sex	<i>How important do my gay/bi friends think it is to use condoms with new partners?</i>	4 - 20	16.27	14.81	***
Social support from friends	<i>I can talk about my problems with my friends.</i>	4 - 24	20.56	19.77	+
Social support from black gay/bisexual friends	<i>My African American gay/bi friends help me feel good about myself.</i>	4 - 24	19.31	18.36	*
Experiences of homophobia past year	<i>In past year, how often have you heard that gay men are sinners?</i>	7 - 34	15.49	18.05	***
Experiences of racism past year	<i>In past year, how often were you treated as if were stupid?</i>	11 - 56	23.68	25.89	**

+p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Relationships between UAI & Context of Sex

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Example of scale items</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>No UAI (Mean)</i>	<i>Had UAI (Mean)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Sex in difficult situations	<i>How often had sex in bookstore, sex club, backroom, or bathhouse?</i>	9 - 45	17.34	21.51	***
Sex in difficult relationships	<i>How often had sex with someone you were afraid of losing?</i>	4 - 20	9.57	11.32	***
Substance use (alcohol/drugs) while having sex	No use of substance Used substances			22.5% 61.2%	***

***p<.001

Relationships Between UAI & Individual-Level Variables (psych & attitudinal)

Variables	Example of scale items	Range	No UAI (Mean)	Had UAI (Mean)	Sig.
Depression	<i>Frequency I have felt sad.</i>	0 - 21	4.42	6.22	***
Gay pride/self-esteem	<i>How happy are you about being gay/bi?</i>	3 - 15	11.14	10.29	***
Internalized homophobia	<i>Does sex with men make you dislike yourself?</i>	3 - 15	6.45	7.35	***
Self-efficacy for safer sex	<i>If you are really turned on, how difficult is it for you to only have safe sex?</i>	4 - 20	17.28	15.53	***
Negative safer sex attitudes	<i>Pausing to put on condom ruins the mood.</i>	3 - 15	5.23	6.74	***
HIV treatment optimism	<i>Current treatments make it easier to relax about having safer sex.</i>	4 - 16	6.73	7.49	**

p<.01; *p<.001

Summary of Correlates Between Having UAI and Multilevel Variables

<i>Structural Issues (life context/culture)</i>	
Low Education	Ever incarcerated
Unemployed/Low Employment	History of homelessness
Ran out of money in past year	Ever forced into sex
Borrowed money in past year	Lower Levels of Spiritual beliefs
<i>Social/Interpersonal variables</i>	
Has primary partner	Experiences of homophobia in past year
Lower social norms for safer sex	Experiences of racism past year
Less social support from black gay/bi friends	
<i>Context of sex</i>	
Sex in difficult situations	Sex in difficult relationships
Substance use during sex	
<i>Individual-Level Variables</i>	
Depression	Negative condom attitudes
Lower gay pride/self-esteem	HIV treatment optimism
Internalized homophobia	Lower self-efficacy for safer sex

Discussion: Being Young Black Men

- NOT the case that YBMSM are “gay men who *happen* to be black” – they are black first (“I’ve always been black!”)
- They have the strengths & resiliency that the black community has—as well as the challenges
- Many YBMSM live in a context of poverty, low education, homelessness—& considerable numbers of men who have had run-ins with the law, making it more difficult to get jobs & scholarships for school – and these all are related to increased risk of UAI
- They also must deal with racism, which impacts their sexual safety
- So – they have to deal with being black in our society – many of the inequities that they must deal with are associated with vulnerability to HIV

Being Gay /Bisexual Within the Black Community

- Most live in the same geographical community they grew up in
- The homophobia that they experience is often from their family & community of origin – and it is debilitating – and is associated with sexual risk behavior
- In Int'l AIDS Conf, presented SEM: found that YBGBM who experience more homophobia are more likely to have sex in contexts that are conducive to unsafe sex, leading to increased sexual risk behavior
- So experiencing homophobia is not only likely related to feeling poorly about yourself, but is also related to putting self into sexual situations where it is difficult to manage their risk

Cultural Issues

(at least the ones we measured)

- Not related to risk behavior
- Frequency of religious attendance, believing that God directs your life and your health—unrelated to risk behavior— and greater spiritual beliefs are *helpful* in avoiding risk behavior— perhaps giving strength to the young men
- Note that in Dallas & Houston, regular and frequent religious attendance is VERY high – at the core of many young men's values, identity, outlook on life

HIV-Stigma: HUGE Issue

- Both within the general black community AND young, black gay community
- Interferes with getting tested, getting onto treatment, discussing HIV amongst their group, encouraging friends to get tested & reducing sexual risk behavior
- Anecdotally: 10-15 deaths in past year in 2 communities among YBMSM
- Need to get YBMSM discussing HIV, taking it as own issue to destigmatize HIV
- *Simply setting up more & more testing facilities is insufficient*
- Cannot solely target HIV-positive YBMSM for change—*many* are very reluctant to disclose to ANYONE that HIV+, friends, people in group, sex partners -- even boyfriends
- Hence, very challenging setting up groups of HIV+ YBMSM (that would focus on adherence & PwP)

Implications

- Most individual-level variables were significantly associated with UAI, as were interpersonal variables—many of these are relevant for most YMSM—and need to be addressed with YBMSM as well
- Social and structural issues may have indirect effects on risky behavior as they influence individual and interpersonal issues, especially empowerment
- Therefore, HIV prevention interventions that try to impact issues at *multiple levels* concurrently are needed.

How to Impact Multilevel Variables

- Target internalized homophobia and beliefs in men's ability that they CAN be safer sexually and know how to do that—including when they are high on drugs/alcohol
- Build social and emotional support from black gay friends about life in general, and specifically about safer sex, and
- Build support and reduce homophobia & AIDS stigma from society—particularly the black community – need mothers, fathers, and sibs supporting their gay sons and brothers, and telling them that they love and accept them for who they are –
- Normalize discussion of HIV—to desigmatize having HIV—and change the norms of the young men's community
- Provide mental health services to help depressed YBMSM
- And – importantly! – we need to tie HIV prevention to programs to help men obtain more education and jobs, which will mean that they will be more empowered in general to take care of themselves

United Black Ellument (U-BE)

- ▶ Adaptation of Mpowerment Project
- ▶ Adapted with *considerable involvement* from community - by advisory groups & focus groups; studying adaptations made by black AIDS organizations implementing MP; and research
- ▶ Being implemented in Dallas currently



U-BE (& MP): Addresses Sexual Risk Reduction AND Increased HIV Testing

- Builds & mobilizes community of YBMSM to support each other to reduce sexual risk & get HIV testing every 6 months – AND in coping with life challenges
- For *both* HIV+ and HIV- men (i.e., the entire community)
- Discusses sexual risk reduction “with your brothers” (i.e., not only about self-protection)
- Distributes LOTS of condoms



Seeks to Address Issues at Different Levels

- Build caring, supportive community to reduce loneliness, increase social support, destigmatize HIV
- Change norms about safer sex, testing every 6 mths, talking HIV
- Enrich and strengthen men's pride about being black and gay/bi
- Eroticize safer sex
- Skills building (eg communication)
- Help men get "life skills" (e.g., job training, how to apply for jobs, encouragement to go to college)
- Build competency (self-efficacy) to have safer sex
- Provide space to "be self"



U-BE Core Group



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