

## **SEXUAL NETWORKS AND SEXUAL MIXING AMONG AUSTRALIAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN**

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### **Background:**

Rapid onward transmission of HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STI) can occur within tight sexual networks and may account for sudden increases in infection rates within key sub-populations. We investigated sexual mixing by age and ethnic background among Australian gay and bisexual men (GBM).

### **Methods:**

In a survey of 1853 Australian GBM, 977 men who reported more than one partner in the previous six months described details about up to six recent sexual encounters.

### **Results:**

Mean age was 35.5 years. Most (86.3%) were of Caucasian background; 2.1% were of Australian Aboriginal background and 7.0% were of Asian background. Most men (85.8%) had been tested for HIV with 10.2% having tested HIV-positive.

Respondents described a mean number of 4.4 (SD 1.65) sexual encounters.

Although the majority reported at least half of their partners were 'Caucasian', few (4.1%) reported only Caucasian partners. Few reported any partners of Aboriginal (5.5%) or Asian (19.4%) background, and very few reported a majority of their partners as being Aboriginal (0%) or Asian (6.2%); this was also the case among the respondents who were of Aboriginal or Asian background themselves. The majority of men reported no encounters with partners aged under 26 (59.8%) or over 50 (85.8%). A third (33.6%) of men who were aged under 25 reported sex mainly with partners of similar age, but this was true for only 12.2% of men aged over 50.

### **Conclusions:**

There was little evidence of predominantly exclusive sexual networks based on age or ethnicity. Most GBM reported relatively non-exclusive sexual mixing with a broad range of types, regardless of their own age or ethnicity. Among Australian GBM, sexual mixing is unlikely to be an explanation for concentrated HIV or STI epidemics in age-based or ethnicity-based sub-populations.

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