

Changes to Sexual Behaviour During Coronavirus Restrictions in MSM Attending a Sexual Health Clinic: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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Background:

Rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI) amongst men who have sex with men (MSM) have been increasing. The rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 (coronavirus) led to social distancing recommendations in Australia on 22nd and 29th March 2020. This study investigated whether MSM changed their sexual behaviour in line with recommendations.

Method:

A cross-sectional survey of MSM attending Adelaide Sexual Health Centre from 1st to 26th June 2020. Analyses were performed using Pearson's chi-squared test for categorical variables, and Wilcoxon's signed rank test and Wilcoxon's rank-sum test for continuous variables.

Results:

114 participants responded. Median number of sexual partners was significantly reduced after the introduction of restrictions from 2 (interquartile range [IQR]: 1 – 5) to 1 (IQR: 0 – 2) ($P < 0.001$).

Participants reporting no partners was significantly higher after restrictions (15.9% vs 35.1%, $P < 0.001$); while those reporting four or more partners was significantly lower after restrictions (33.6% vs 11.4%, $P < 0.001$). Participants reporting 1-3 partners in the month remained relatively stable (50.4% vs 53.5%, $P = 0.644$).

Median number of partners pre-restrictions was greater in those on PrEP (3, IQR: 1 – 5) than those not on PrEP (1, IQR: 1 – 3) ($P = 0.035$). There was no significant difference in number of partners reported based on previous STI ($P = 0.168$).

Conclusion:

During the period of coronavirus restrictions, our MSM population reduced their sexual partner number. Further research is needed to understand motivations for these changes, whether STI incidence in our population will be impacted, and whether incidence will increase following the lifting of restrictions.

Disclosure of interest

T. Bromley – none to declare

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M. Ratnayake – none to declare