

SWASH data, lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women and HIV risk.

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Background:

The Sydney Women and Sexual Health (SWASH) survey began due to HIV risk concern for women engaging with gay, bisexual and/or queer men (GBQM). Sexuality is not captured in the NSW notification of HIV infection form, creating limitations in NSW epidemiological categories for recording HIV risk exposure, whereby, women-to-women transmission is not captured, and transmission between GBQ men and LBQ women is categorised as heterosexual exposure. As such, we don't know transmission rates between GBQ men and LBQ women and how many LBQ women are living with HIV in Australia. Consistent SWASH data suggests a need to improve data collection, and how assumptions about sexual practices associated with gender and sexuality may be preventing access to biomedical prevention technologies for people at risk of HIV.

Methods:

SWASH is a cross-sectional repeated survey of LGBTQ community-engaged LBQ women; recruitment takes place during the Sydney Mardi Gras season, by paper and online surveys. Surveys were collected in February/early March 2020. We also draw on 23 semi-structured interviews with LBQ women, conducted as part of the 4th author's PhD thesis.

Results:

A significant proportion of SWASH respondents (17% – 32% over all survey years; 24% average) report ever having sex with MSM; around 9% indicate sex in the preceding 6 months with a consistent proportion reporting unprotected vaginal or anal sex. While absolute numbers are relatively small, vaginal or anal intercourse without a condom has increased over time.

Conclusion:

Given consistent SWASH data, should there be targeted promotion of PrEP to LBQ women who have sex with GBQ men? The NSW HIV strategy 2021-2025 lists sexual partners of members of priority populations as a priority population, yet PrEP Prescriber Guidelines only mention heterosexual women. How do we remain current and effective if assumptions around practice and risk are increasingly inadequate regarding LGBTQ sexual health and HIV responses?

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

ACON is funded by the NSW Ministry of Health.