

# DIFFERENCES IN NUMBER OF SEXUAL PARTNERS AMONG GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN BEFORE AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A REPEATED CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY

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## Background:

The aim of this study was to determine if there was a difference in number of sex and kissing partners among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) between April-June 2019 and April-June 2020 when there were nationwide isolation measures due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

## Methods:

A repeated cross-sectional survey for GBMSM was disseminated at six sexual health clinics across four Australian states in June 2019 and June 2020. Participants were asked to report the number of male kissing and sex partners in the previous three months, and whether they had engaged in rimming, or used saliva as lube in the previous three months. Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to compare continuous variables and chi-square test was used to compare categorical variables.

## Results:

There were 657 completed surveys returned in 2019 and 587 in 2020. The median age did not differ between the two surveys (32, interquartile range [IQR]: 27-39 in 2019; vs 32 [IQR]: 27-40 in 2020;  $p=0.165$ ). Participants had fewer male sex partners (with/without kissing) in 2020 compared to 2019 (5 [IQR]: 3-10 in 2019 vs 4 [IQR] 2-8 in 2020;  $p=0.001$ ). There was no significant difference in the median number of kissing-only partners (1 [IQR]: 0-3 in 2019 vs 1 [IQR]: 0-2] in 2020;  $p=0.102$ ). Fewer participants engaged in insertive rimming in 2020 compared to 2019 (55.2% vs 61.2%;  $p=0.035$ ) but there was no difference in proportion who had

receptive rimming (48.8% in 2020 vs 72.7% in 2019;  $p=0.132$ ) or used saliva as lubricant (67.0% in 2020 vs 63.2% in 2019;  $p=0.155$ ).

**Conclusion:**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of sex partners reduced in 2020 compared to 2019 but there was no significant reduction in number of kissing-only partners. Reduction in sex partners may potentially lead to a reduction in STI rates.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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