

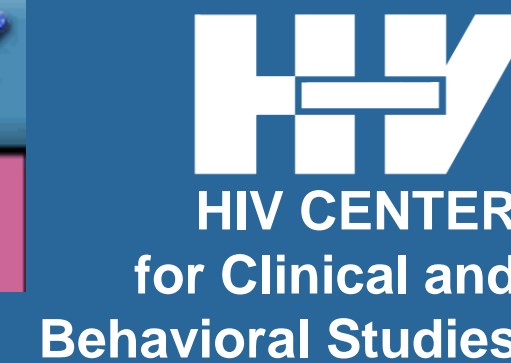
# Social Networks, Social Support and HIV-Risk Behaviors among Men who have Sex with Men in Durban, South Africa: A Pilot Study

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## INTRODUCTION

- South Africa continues to have the world's highest prevalence of HIV infection.
- MSM in South Africa remain one of the most at-risk populations for HIV infection, yet little is known about the social, sexual and support networks of this population.
- MSM in South Africa may face barriers to social support from families due to existing stigma on same-sex sexuality.
- Social networks and support structures within networks are shown to affect HIV-risk behaviors among MSM.
  - By diffusion of *health information*, social networks may increase individuals' knowledge of HIV-risk behaviors.
  - Perceptions of *social norms* for unsafe-sex within networks influence individuals' HIV-risk behaviors.

### CURRENT STUDY

The current ego-centric cross-sectional pilot study aimed at understanding the composition of MSM's social networks, social support within those networks and HIV-risk behaviors.

## METHODS

- N = 65; male, at least 18, Black/African, have had sex with at least one man in past 30 days, willing to refer social network
- 7 seed participants recruited through a community-based organization in Durban; seeds identified and referred their male network members to participate in study.
- Participants completed interviewer-assisted social network assessment (SNA) and survey.

Table 1. Participants Characteristics

Sexual Identity (%)	HIV Status (%)
Gay (70.8)	Negative (44.6)
Bisexual (20.0)	Positive (9.2)
Heterosexual (3.1)	Don't know (30.8)
Transgender (6.2)	Didn't answer (15.4)

▪ Mean<sub>Age</sub> = 25.6 (SD = 5.46)

## RESULTS

Table 2. Social Network Provision of Support and HIV-Risk Behaviors

	No. of sexual partners (r)	No. of UIAI partners (r)	Any UIAI (OR)	Social norms for condom use (r)
<b>Network Characteristics</b>				
Length of relation	-.27*	-.23	.99	.09
Sex w/any network member	.29*	.34**	6.36**	.19
<b>Informational Support</b>				
Talking HIV	-.30*	-.21	.89	-.04
Talking Health	-.09	-.04	1.33	.31*
<b>Instrumental Support</b>				
A place to stay	.21	.30*	3.45**	.05
Borrow money	.33	-.11	2.82*	.02
<b>Emotional Support</b>				
Open about sexuality	.13	.17	.92	.39***
Accepting of sexuality	.05	.06	.94	.33**

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ;  $r$  = Correlation Coefficient; OR = Odds Ratio

## CONCLUSIONS

- Characteristics of social networks, overlap of sexual and social networks, and social support predicted sexual risk behaviors and perceptions of norms for consistent condom-use.
- Social networks are important tools for understanding the spread of health information, and social norms for safe-sex.
- Support structures of existing social networks of MSM in South Africa may be utilized in HIV prevention network interventions.

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