Social Discrimination and Sexual HIV Acquisition Risk Behavior among Urban MSM

Background: Understanding what social factors are associated with risk of HIV acquisition and transmission among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) is a critical public health goal. Experiencing discrimination may increase risk of HIV infection among MSM. This analysis assessed relations between experiences of sexual orientation- and race-based discrimination and sexual HIV risk behavior among MSM in New York City.

Methods: 1369 MSM completed a self-administered computerized assessment of past 3-month sexual behavior, experience of social discrimination and other covariates. Regression models assessed relations between recent experience of discrimination and sexual HIV risk behavior.

Results: Mean age was 32 years; 32% were white; 32% Latino/Hispanic; 25% African American/Black. Of MSM who self-reported HIV-positive or unknown status (N=377), 7% (N=27) reported unprotected receptive anal intercourse with an HIV-positive or unknown status partner (“HIV transmission risk”). Of the HIV-positive or unknown status MSM (377), 7% (N=27) reported unprotected receptive anal intercourse with a partner who was HIV-positive or unknown status (“HIV acquisition risk”). In the past 3 months: 15% of men reported experiencing either sexual orientation- or race/ethnicity-related discrimination in their home or social neighborhood; 5% reported sexual orientation-based discrimination only and another 5% reported race-based discrimination only; 6% reported experiencing both forms of discrimination in their home or social neighborhoods. Sample Sociodemographic Characteristics: The average age was 32.0 (SD=10.3); 32% were white (non-Hispanic); 32% Hispanic; 25% Black/African American and 13% other. 49% reported being married or in a registered domestic partnership with another man. 88% reported being employed; 30% was not working. 26% reported personal income of LT$10,000 per year; 30% $10,399.99; 32% $25,000-40,000. 48% reported not having enough money for rent, food utilities and other basic needs. 4% reported being married or in a registered domestic partnership with another man. 88% sex identified as male, 3% bisexual; 3% as straight/heterosexual/or “other”. Average “outness” was 8.2 (range: 1-10; SD=3.3), indicating that most men were “out” to most people they know.

Primary Dependent Measures
- HIV risk acquisition behavior was coded as 1 among HIV-negative participants who had unprotected receptive anal sex with any type (e.g. partner gender, age) of HIV-positive or unknown status male sex partner; the remaining HIV-negative participants were coded as 0.
- HIV transmission risk behavior was coded as 1 among HIV-positive or unknown status participants who had unprotected receptive anal sex with any HIV-infected or unknown status male sex partner; the remaining HIV-positive or unknown status participants were coded 0.

Race-based discrimination: “Have you experienced discrimination, been prevented from doing something or been hassled or been made to feel inferior because of your race, ethnicity or color?”

Sexual orientation-based discrimination: “Have you experienced discrimination, been prevented from doing something or been hassled or been made to feel inferior because of your race, ethnicity or color?”

RESULTS

Of the HIV-negative MSM (392), 11% (110) reported unprotected receptive anal intercourse with an HIV-positive or unknown status partner ("HIV acquisition risk"). Of the HIV-positive or unknown status MSM (377), 7% (N=27) reported unprotected receptive anal intercourse with a partner who was HIV-positive or unknown status ("HIV transmission risk").

Analysis of the association between experiences of discrimination and sexual HIV risk behavior was conducted using cross-sectional data from a single study. Continuous psychosocial factors (e.g., psychological distress, internalized homophobia, AOD use before sex, peer norms, etc.) and the primary dependent variable were assessed using chi-squares, t-tests, one-way ANOVAs, and Mann-Whitney non-parametric tests. Discrimination and sexual HIV risk behavior variance explained levels were set at p<0.05 for inclusion in the multivariable model. Continuous measures were standardized so that the odds ratios reflect one standard deviation change in the score of the measure. Multivariable logistic regression models were built entering conceptually related sets of variables that did not retain statistical significance were eliminated at each step.

DISCUSSION

Increased exposure to sexual orientation-based discrimination will decrease HIV risk among MSM; longitudinal research is needed to determine whether reductions in exposure to sexual orientation-based discrimination will decrease sexual HIV risk behavior among MSM. Reducing the experience of sexual orientation-based discrimination is a critical social goal independent of its role in the HIV epidemic. There is increasing evidence that discriminatory behavior and policies adversely relate to the mental health and well-being of LGBT people in the US.

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