



2007 Sex Now Survey Report

The Community Based Research Centre launched Sex Now in August 2007 in conjunction with Vancouver's Pride Festival, as it has since 2002. Ads in *Xtra West*, a float in the parade, a booth at the festival and thousands of promotional items like fridge magnets and dog tags were deployed during Pride to stimulate survey participation online at sexnowsurvey.com. Participation was also promoted more directly on the internet using banner ads, email networks and letters to members of gay contact websites. By the end of the recruitment period in late December, 1,550 respondents had answered the 2007 questionnaire. This report focuses on men under 30 relative to older men in the survey.

SEX NOW INDEX 2007

Under 30

Number of qualified men who completed the survey: 1533

Portion under 30 years of age: 31%

Portion under 26: 23%

Portion of men under 30 who were single: 71%

Portion partnered with another man: 22%

Portion of men 30-44 partnered with another man: 38%

Portion of men under 30 reporting sexual risk for HIV infection: 42%

Portion over 30 reporting sexual risk: 35%

Portion of men under 30 "hooking up" with new partners: 24%

Portion "dating": 25%

Portion of men over 30 "dating": 9%

Portion of men under 30 who were HIV positive: 3.4%

Portion who took an HIV test in the last year: 55%

Portion over 30 who were HIV positive: 15%

Portion of men under 30 who found their most recent partner on the Internet: 58%

Portion in 2002: 17%

Portion of men under 30 consuming alcohol: 90%

Marijuana: 49%

Cocaine: 16%

Crystal methamphetamine: 5%

Portion of sexually active men under 30 who reported pressure for sex without condoms: 41%

Portion who said they can deflect this pressure: 75%

Portion over 30 reporting such pressure: 34%

Portion of men under 30 aware of AIDS Vancouver: 33%

Portion over 30: 52%

Portion under 30 aware of Gayway: 32%

The Centre 31%

YouthCo: 27%

Trend Analysis

The Sex Now survey, like other surveys of gay and other MSM in the US, UK and Australia, measures the proportions of men reporting sexual risk in the previous 12 months in order to assess HIV and STI prevention dynamics in the population. Sexual risk is measured by instances of unprotected anal sex with an unknown sero-status partner (UAIU) calculated in response to a series of detailed questions in the survey.

The survey has gathered this and related information since 2002 which makes it possible to review trends over a five year period.

Sexual risk: after a period of relative stability from 2002 to 2006 the proportion of men reporting activities which could transmit HIV has increased from about 25% to 37% in 2007 (p=.000).

Testing practices: the proportion of gay men who have never taken an HIV test has gradually increased from 11% to 17% (p=.000).

Crystal methamphetamine: the use of crystal meth as a party drug (strongly associated with sexual risk) has gradually declined from 11% to 6% (p=.000).

Internet partners: the proportion of men who found their latest partner on the internet has increased from 17% to 58% (p=.000).

Community involvement: the proportion of men who spend more than half of their free time involved community life with other gay men has decreased from 62% to 42% (p=.000).

These findings suggest dramatic shifts are reshaping the social and sexual norms of gay culture. Such shifts are not unprecedented. Dramatic increases in sexual risk were noted in the Vanguard cohort survey in the late 1990's. This trend was followed by sharply rising HIV infections noted by the BC CDC in 2001 and years beyond.

Partner pressure: The Sex Now survey was created to test a hypothesis: aggregate shifts in individual risk activity are indicative of normative change in the population. To observe the effects of normative change in-situ, the 2004 survey introduced a question probing partner pressure for sex without condoms. Indeed, regression analysis showed that partner pressure was the most potent predictor of sexual risk among all indicators probed in the 2004 survey (OR=3.6, 95% CI: 2.888-4.333). Since then, the numbers affected by partner pressure have been gradually increasing from 31% of sexually active men in 2004 to 36% in 2007 (p=.023).

Sexual Risk Assessment

Sex Now 2007 showed that young gay men under 30 were significantly more likely to have engaged in sexual activities with HIV exposure risks than older aged men. This is a reversal of previous years in which younger men were either relatively less at risk (2002) or about the same risk (2004) as older aged men.

While the 2007 survey showed that about 37% of participants overall reported sexual risk activity in the previous 12 months, the proportion was actually 42% of men under 30 (p=.008). In other words, younger men were 1.5 times more likely to have reported sexual risk than older men (OR=1.492, 95% CI: 1.160–1.919).

The dramatic increase in the proportion of men reporting sexual risk combined with greater risk expressed in men under 30 seems indicative of a widening gap in prevention between younger and older men.

Pressure effects

Men under 30 (41%) were significantly more likely to have reported partner pressure for sex without condoms than older men (34%) in 2007 ($p=.019$). Younger men who had experienced such pressure were also significantly more likely to have reported sexual risk in the previous 12 months than older men 55% v 50% ($p=.015$). In 2007, young men who reported sexual risk sex were 1.7 times more likely to have encountered partner pressure than those who had maintained consistent sexual safety (OR=1.717, 95% CI: 1.333-2.213).

These results appear to confirm that sexual safety norms of the population are changing significantly and the impact may be felt directly as increasing instances of partner pressure for sex without condoms. These effects appear to be greater among younger men.

HIV and STI Testing

Men under 30 varied considerably from older men by their participation in HIV testing. About 31% of younger men had never tested v 12% of older men ($p=.000$). The prevalence of HIV infection measured by the survey was 3.4% among men under 30 compared to 15.1% in older men.

Younger men were much less likely to have adopted routine HIV testing than older men 35% v 54%. Younger men were also much less likely to have requested an HIV test from their own doctor than older men and more likely to have visited a walk-in clinic. About 40% of both younger and older men had presented for STI testing in the previous 12 months.

Prevention Attitudes

Nonetheless, men under 30 either did not differ appreciably or appeared to be more conservative than older men on several measures of attitude toward sexual safety. For example, about 73% of both age groups disagreed that “HIV positive men on anti-retroviral medications are less infectious than those who are not on medications”. And only small minorities of about 8% in both age groups believed that “sex was less a worry given the effectiveness of anti-retroviral medications”.

Younger men (13.6%), however, were significantly less likely than older men (19.2%) to say they “would rather risk infection than use a condom” ($p=.009$). Younger men were also less likely to agree that “low viral load decreases transmission risks with HIV positive men” 11.7% v 17.1% ($p=.008$)

Access to sexual health information

Only about 13% of younger men said they had any difficulty with access to relevant sexual health information, however, this was a significantly larger minority ($p=.000$) than that of older men (6%). On the other hand, younger men (44%) were more likely than older men (37%) to have recalled seeing the most recent prevention ad campaign in the community, *I have sex. So I get tested*.

Connection to community prevention programs

Some indications suggest that younger men may be falling further behind older men in a general trend of declining involvement in community programs. Younger men, for example, were

significantly less likely than older men to be aware of the major HIV service organizations in the city: AIDS Vancouver and BC Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA). However, men under 30 were as likely as older men to be aware of the Bute clinic (STI testing) and the Centre (social services) although only about 30% of either group were aware of these services.

Nevertheless, data from the survey suggest a large majority of younger men would want to be involved in dedicated health programs if conditions were more attractive. About 88% of survey participants overall said they would support the idea of an organization dedicated to gay men's health. Younger men were significantly more likely than older men to want to be directly involved in this organization's programs (58%) and voluntary activities (52%).

The internet appears to be highly attractive to younger men's community interests. For example, 83% of men under 30 claimed to have a profile on "facebook.com" compared to only 32% of older men. Younger men (42%) were also more likely than older men (16%) to have a profile on "myspace.com".

Vulnerabilities

Men under 30 were nearly 3 times more likely (43%) than older men (20%) to have been exposed to antigay verbal and physical violence (OR=2.922, 95% CI: 2.307-3.702). Exposure to antigay violence was associated with increased sexual risk (p=.003) though with greater force in younger men 43.8% v 25.8 % (p=.005). Younger men (18%) were also significantly more likely than older men (12%) to have had their employment affected by antigay discrimination.

Summary

The Sex Now 2007 survey has exposed dramatic shifts reshaping gay sexual culture, especially among younger men under 30, which could have an equally dramatic impact on new sexually transmitted infections if left unaddressed.

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