

SEXUAL AGREEMENTS AMONG MALE SAME-SEX COUPLES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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STUDY OBJECTIVES

Two thirds of new HIV infection among men who have sex with men (MSM) occur from primary partners^{i, ii}. In western contexts, sexual agreements about sex with outside partners are common among male couples, and play an important role in couples' HIV riskⁱⁱⁱ. The formation and adherence to sexual agreement has been reported to relate to higher levels of trust, communication and commitment within relationshipsⁱⁱⁱ.

METHODS

Sample

27 Couples:
South Africa (n=16)
Namibia (n=11)

Data

Partners were interviewed separately but simultaneously. Data from 18 couples (n=36) contained information on sexual agreements, including explicit or implicit sexual agreements and agreement characteristics

Data Analysis

The data was analysed by dyad using a thematic analysis^{iv}

RESULTS

The results indicated that three main types of sexual agreements were common, discussions about sexual agreements were difficult and may be prompted by concerns regarding infidelity, HIV prevention, and fostering a loving, committed and trusting relationship. Power within the partnership effects the negotiation of sexual agreements and in some cases discrepant agreements may exist

Sexual Agreements



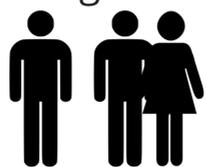
Implicit

Monogamous



Explicit

Monogamous

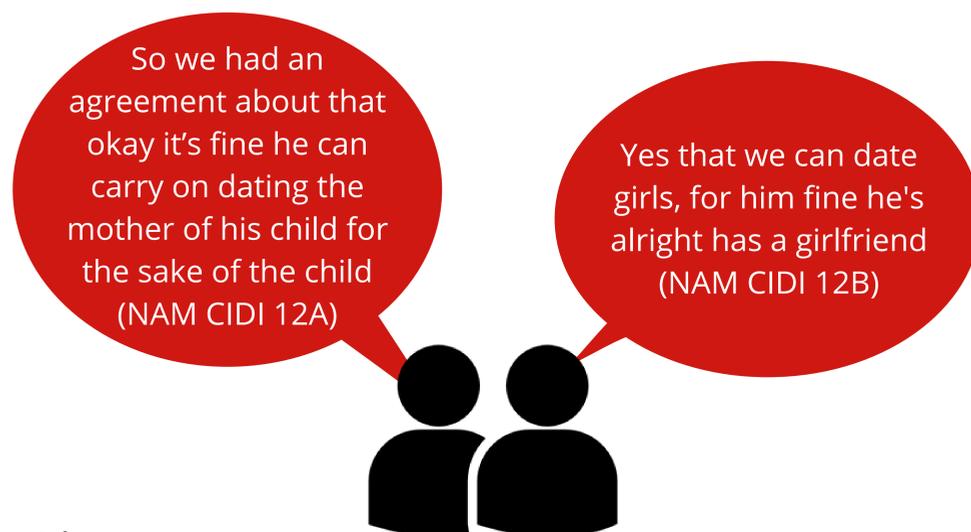


Explicit

Open relationship with
FEMALE partners only

Discrepant Agreements

In some cases, a partner described the terms of their sexual agreement differently to his partner



Power



The "top" or more dominant partner tends to own the power to negotiate seeking outside partners in sexual agreements

HIV Prevention & Testing



Increased HIV testing and consistent condom use within the relationship tended to be prompted by infidelity concerns, particularly when sexual agreements are implicit

DISCUSSION

The findings suggests that difficulties in communicating about HIV and sexual agreements may hinder establishing explicit agreements thus placing couples at increased risk for HIV. Couples with sexual agreements tend to favour monogamous relationships. Southern African contexts appear to support the replication of hetero-normative sexual behaviour given that same-sex sexual behaviour is criminalised or highly stigmatised. Partnerships may also mirror gendered power dynamics evident in heterosexual relationships where "tops" like heterosexual men control decision - the term agreement then, might be a misnomer for some couples. Dyadic intervention efforts have the potential to provide couples with the skills to discuss and create agreements.

References: iGoodreau, S., Carnegie, N., Vittinghoff, E., Lama, J., & Sanchez, J. (2012). What drives the US and Peruvian epidemics in men who have sex with men (MSM)? PLoS One, 7, (e50522) iiSullivan, P., Salazar, L., Buchbinder, S., & Sanchez, T. (2009). Estimating the proportion of HIV transmission from main sex partners among men who have sex with men in five US cities. AIDS, 23(9):1153-62. iii Gomez, A. M., Beougher, S. C., Chakravarty, D., Neilands, T. B., Mandic, C. G., Darbes, L. A., & Hoff, C. C. (2012). Relationship dynamics as predictors of broken agreements about outside sexual partners: implications for HIV prevention among gay couples. AIDS and Behavior, 16(6), 1584-1588 ivBraun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101. Funding: The study was supported through funding from DFID and Mott MacDonald Disclaimer: The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the funder Collaborators: The study was conducted by the HSRC in collaboration with Positive Vibes, Namibia; the Gay and Lesbian Network, Pietermaritzburg; the University of California San Francisco; and the University of Michigan Affiliations: 1Human and Social Development Programme, Human Sciences Research Council, Sweetwaters, South Africa 2School of Law, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa 3School of Public Health, University of Michigan 4School of Nursing, University of Michigan 5School of Medicine, University of California San Francisco