

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HIV RISK AMONG BLACK MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS

Farnaz Kaighobadi¹; Kate Collier¹; Vasu Reddy^{2,3}; Xolani Tshabalala²; Theo Sandfort¹

¹HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies, New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University, New York, NY, USA; ²Human Sciences Research Council, Human and Social Development, Pretoria, South Africa; ³University of KwaZulu-Natal, Humanities and Social Sciences, Durban, South Africa

KEY MESSAGES

- The results of this study identified four common contexts of sexual violence experienced by Black MSM living in South African townships: Consensual sex, alcohol use, transactional sex, and condom-request.
- Those MSM who experienced sexual violence were more likely to self-identify as: gay, feminine, and to prefer a receptive sexual role.
- Six out of the 17 MSM who experienced sexual violence in this sample were HIV positive.
- The results also revealed discrimination by the police following MSM's reports of rape.



INTRODUCTION

- Due to stigma attached to same-sex sexuality, sexual violence or rape of men by men is often under-reported and under-studied.
- Men who are victims of sexual violence find it more difficult to negotiate safe sex with their abusive partners.
- Men with unwanted sexual experiences are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviors.
- Little is known about the interpersonal context in which sexual violence occurs, and the characteristics of the perpetrator and victim, especially among South African MSM.
- The goals of this study were to understand:
 1. The characteristics of South African MSM who experience sexual violence;
 2. The context of sexual violence; and
 3. The implications of violence for HIV risk in this sample.

METHODS

- In-depth interviews were conducted with 81 Black MSM from from four townships in Tshwane.
- Age range: 20-39 years.
- Engaging in oral, anal, or masturbatory sex with at least one male in the preceding year was an eligibility criterion.
- Using ATLAS.ti software, coders independently applied a set of a priori concept-driven codes to the interview transcripts.
- Initially transcripts were coded by two coders. After consensus on application of the codes was reached, the remaining transcripts were coded by one coder.
- The *Sexual Violence Code* included: "Descriptions of observations or experiences where the informant felt pressured into having sex with someone against his will or was threatened with rape or other forms of sexual violence by regular partners, casual partners, or strangers."

RESULTS

Characteristics of 17 men out of 81 who reported experiences of sexual violence

CHARACTERISTICS	N (Total = 17)
Sexual Identity	
Gay	17
Transgender	3
Drag Queen	4
Gender Presentation	
Masculine	2
Feminine	15
Partner Preference	
Masculine	11
Unknown	6
Sexual Role Preference	
Bottom	15
Top	1
Versatile	1
HIV Status	
Positive	6
Negative	7
Unknown	4

■ Four common overlapping contexts of sexual violence emerged:

1. Consensual sex with both steady and casual partners sometimes turned violent.

"He [boyfriend] wanted us to have sex & then as I refused he was like trying to blackmail me that I probably have sex with other people... so, I ended up having sex with him just to please him, not to feel anything." -Gay, 27

3. Alcohol use was related to perpetration of violence & inability to say no.

"I was too drunk to say no" -Gay, 22
"He called me up to his place, he was drunk, he forced me to sleep with him, he slapped me." -Gay, 20

5. Some men felt forced to have sex when they were offered money or drinks.

"I did not want to do something with someone I did not like... but I was forced & when he [friend] said to me 'do it now, he is going to give you R100 for a night'... Then I know I am going to do it, not for the whole night." -Drag Queen, 38

7. Condom negotiations sometimes provoked violence.

"He [boyfriend] wanted us to stop using condoms. I was against it, and he forced himself on me & it hurt..." -Gay, 28

- Participants reported discrimination by the police, which could have the effect of deterring reports of sexual violence.

"One [police] said how can they not be raped with high heels because they have taken the job of a woman..." -Drag Queen, 34

CONCLUSIONS

- This research sought to gain a better understanding of sexual violence among Black MSM in South African townships in relation to risk of HIV infection.
- Consensual sex, alcohol use, transactional sex, and condom-request were common contexts of sexual violence.
- MSM who experienced sexual violence were more likely to report being HIV+ than were MSM who did not report sexual violence (35% versus 6%).
- The interviews also revealed MSMs' perceptions of discrimination from the police following rape reports.
- Considering the negative health and psychological outcomes of sexual violence, there is a need for:
 1. Increased awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence within same-sex relationships in the community & amongst service providers.
 2. Increased attention to sexual violence in HIV policy-making and practice in South Africa.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by an NIMH grant (R01-MH083557; PI: Theo Sandfort, Ph.D.) and an NIMH center grant (P30-MH43520; PI: Anke A. Ehrhardt, Ph.D.). Dr. Kaighobadi is supported by an NIMH training grant (T32-MH19139, Behavioral Sciences Research in HIV Infection; PI: Theo Sandfort, Ph.D.). Special thanks are due to OUT LGBT Well-being, members of the study's Community Advisory Board, and the study participants.