

Black gay men may be at increased HIV risk

29 June 2009

Black gay men have less choice when it comes to sexual partners than other groups and, as a result, their sexual networks are closely knit. These tightly interconnected networks make the rapid spread of HIV more likely. In a study looking at social and sexual mixing between ethnic groups in men who have sex with men, H. Fisher Raymond and Willi McFarland, from the San Francisco Department of Public Health in the US, show that social barriers faced by Black gay men may have a serious impact on their health and well-being. Their findings are published in Springer's journal *AIDS and Behavior*.

In the US, there is a disproportionate burden of HIV infection in Black Americans, who accounted for nearly half of all HIV/AIDS cases diagnosed in 2006 - four times the national average. Raymond and McFarland's research looks at the current levels of sexual mixing between racial and ethnic groups of men who have sex with men in San Francisco, and identifies reasons that underlie these sexual mixing patterns.

A total of 1,142 gay men took part in computer-assisted interviews. They were asked about their own ethnicity, the race of their sexual partners in the last six months, their perception of how easy it is to meet sexual partners of different ethnicities, where they meet sexual partners, their view of HIV infection risk and the predominant race of their network of friends.

Black gay men are the least preferred of sexual partners by other races. [Black men](#) are perceived to be riskier to have sex with, which can lead to men of other races avoiding Black men as sexual partners. They are also perceived as less welcome in the common social venues of gay men in San Francisco. As a result, Black men are three times more likely to have [sexual partners](#) that are also Black, than would be expected by chance alone.

In the authors' view, the combination of attitudes on the part of non-Black gay men, friendships and social networks that are less likely to include

Blacks, and the environments found in gay venues serve to separate Black gay men from other groups. Consequently, the sexual networks of Blacks are pushed to be more highly interconnected than other groups, with the potential for a more rapid spread of HIV and a higher sustained prevalence of infection among Black gay men.

The authors conclude: "The racial disparity in HIV observed for more than a decade will not disappear until the challenges posed by a legacy of racism towards Blacks in the US are addressed."

More information: Raymond HF & McFarland W (2009). Racial mixing and HIV risk among men who have sex with men. *AIDS and Behavior*; DOI 10.1007/s10461-009-9574-6, dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10461-009-9574-6

Source: Springer

APA citation: Black gay men may be at increased HIV risk (2009, June 29) retrieved 29 September 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-06-black-gay-men-hiv.html>

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