

Researchers find diverse supportive partnerships among older gay men with and without HIV

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Recent data reveals that gay men living with HIV report having supportive relationships with family, friends, or in informal relationships rather than with primary romantic partners, while gay men who are HIV negative report having relationships mainly with primary partners. Additionally, gay men living with HIV were more likely to report no primary or secondary supportive partnerships compared to men who are HIV negative. The analysis was led by researchers at Georgetown University Medical Center.

Along with successful HIV treatments, it is known that the presence of social support impacts long-term survival among men living with HIV. However, little has been known about the types of supportive [relationship](#) among gay men in general, and none for those men living with HIV. Identifying the types of relationships could inform how they impact healthy aging among this community of men.

To fill this knowledge gap, Georgetown researchers conducted a study to identify the types of supportive relationships among middle-aged and older gay men living with and without HIV.

The finding appears February 17, 2021, in *PLOS ONE*.

Lead author Matthew Statz, a 3rd year [medical student](#) at Georgetown University School of Medicine, and his colleagues, collected supportive relationship data from 1,054 men participating in the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (Baltimore-Washington, DC, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles) from 2016-2019.

The average age of the men was 62, with similar numbers of HIV positive and negative men. The study participants were asked about any primary or secondary supportive relationships in their life. A

primary relationship was defined as a long-term relationship that included marriage, other forms of legal commitment, or a strong romantic commitment between partners. Secondary relationships included close friends, biological family members, chosen family sexual partners, or former romantic partners.

"We recognized that little was known about the types of supportive relationships these men were had—whether they were in committed romantic relationships, or if they relied on other non-romantic partnerships, such as family and friends," said Statz.

"The large number of older gay men, regardless of their HIV status, who reported having neither a primary nor secondary supportive relationship was unexpected and concerning," said Statz. "The importance of social support has been clearly established in the management of chronic illness, including HIV."

Statz says the study paves the way for further research in progress into how these men's partnerships impact all aspects of their mental and [physical health](#) including implications for HIV viral suppression, frailty, and loneliness.

Provided by Georgetown University Medical Center

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