Correlates of Sexual Contact, COVID Testing, and Comfort Attending Sexual Venues During the COVID-19 Pandemic in a Global Sample of Gay, Bisexual, and Other Men Who Have Sex with Men

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Background

Gay social and sexual venues are important targets for HIV prevention engagement.

Many venues faced closure and operational restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

GBMSM continued to remain connected through gay geo-social networking apps throughout the pandemic.
Objectives

**Aim 1:** Examine the impact of COVID-19 on GBMSM’s social and sexual venue attendance

**Aim 2:** Explore correlates of sexual contact during the COVID-19 pandemic
Methods

- Eligibility
  - Aged 18 and above
  - Current Hornet user
  - Provided informed consent

- Recruitment
  - 10/25/2020-11/19/2020

- Criteria for this analysis (n = 15,499)
  - Cisgender men
  - 134 countries

HORNET 25 million users globally

UCLA Hub for Health Intervention, Policy and Practice
Participant Characteristics (N=15,499)

Sexual Orientation

- Gay: 76.19%
- Bisexual: 18.12%
- Pansexual: 1.85%
- Queer: 0.95%
- Asexual: 1.14%
- Questioning: 1.75%

Place of Residence

- Capital city: 32.01%
- Large city: 88.03%
- Suburb near a large city: 7.86%
- Small city/town: 16.90%
- Rural area/village: 4.52%
- Farm/isolated house: 0.67%

Average Age: 35
Results

Sexual Contact

Sexual partners in the past month (mean): 2.42

Time Spent on Gay Social Networking Apps

- Less time: 17.36%
- About the same: 44.26%
- More time: 38.39%
Results

When was your last HIV test?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;3 months</td>
<td>35.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 months</td>
<td>23.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>15.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+ months</td>
<td>25.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever taken PrEP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>87.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, still taking it</td>
<td>8.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but no longer taking due to COVID</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, no longer taking due to other reasons</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but contracted HIV</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12.13% reported having no or less access to condoms and/or lubricants during the COVID-19 crisis
Results

- Compared to those who did not have a COVID test, those who did were 1.30 times more likely to have sexual contact.
- Compared to those who tested negative for COVID, those who tested positive were 1.28 times more likely to have sexual contact.
# Social and Sexual Venue Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adjusted Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comfort Bars (ref: comfort now)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once public health officials indicate it’s safe</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>[0.49, 0.64]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once there’s a vaccine</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>[0.39, 0.51]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once my friends start going</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>[0.49, 0.82]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comfort Sauna (ref: comfort now)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once public health officials indicate it’s safe</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>[0.40, 0.55]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once there’s a vaccine</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>[0.32, 0.44]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once my friends start going</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>[0.52, 1.02]</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comfort Sex Party (ref: comfort now)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once public health officials indicate it’s safe</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>[0.29, 0.42]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once there’s a vaccine</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>[0.25, 0.34]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once my friends start going</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>[0.32, 0.59]</td>
<td>&lt;.001***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sexual partnerships forged online have continued among GBMSM during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over half of participants (65%) had physical sexual contact with a partner they met on a gay social networking app since the COVID-19 crisis began.

Those who felt comfortable attending social/sexual venues now were more likely to have sexual contact.

Discussion
Future Directions

- A need for ongoing attention to HIV prevention focused on social and sexual venues GBMSM frequent

- Leveraging geosocial networking applications to reach users with COVID-19 vaccination and testing information

- Tailoring messaging to foster trust between GBMSM and public health officials
Limitations

- Participants were recruited from the internet
  - Generalizability
- Self-reported data
  - Social desirability bias
  - Recall bias
- Public health changes since data collection
Acknowledgements

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- Sean Howell
- All the participants
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Thank You

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