

HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS & ATTITUDES AMONG YOUNG MSM IN MIAMI

The Young Men's Survey was an interview-based research study funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to estimate the prevalence of HIV and related risk behaviors among young men who have sex with men (MSM). During 1998-2000, YMS phase II was conducted to sample MSM aged 23-29 years in six U.S. cities. Miami, Florida was one of the six metropolitan areas chosen to participate in the survey. Specially trained interviewers visited gay bars, video clubs, dance clubs, and other well-known social centers frequented by men who have sex with men. Study participants agreed to answer a lengthy questionnaire and to have an HIV antibody test. All participants were offered prevention counseling, referrals, literature, and condoms. The YMS methodology has been published elsewhere.¹ In Miami, there were 490 participants between the ages of 23-29 enrolled in the survey but only 469 were included in the analysis; one was not sexually active, 15 of the participants had sex only with women, four participants were not tested for HIV, and one survey was invalid.

• Overall 469 participants were determined to be sexually active men who had sex only with men or with both men and women. Of these, 46 tested positive for HIV yielding a positivity rate of 9.8%. A total of 421 (89.8%) had anal intercourse with another man in the last six months. Of these, 215 or 51.1% had unprotected anal sex. Almost half of the participants (224, or 47.8%) were Hispanic and 23 (10.3%) were positive. The positivity rate among whites was 10.3% (16/155). Positivity rates were higher among blacks (3/18, or 16.7%) though based on few positives, and lower among "other races" (4/72, or 5.6%; includes Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian and Other). Among the 46 men who were HIV positive, 37.0% had heard about new combination drug treatment for HIV. These drugs are taken by someone who is infected with HIV to improve their quality and length of life.

Figure 1. Seropositivity Rates Among YMS Participants by Selected Social Characteristics

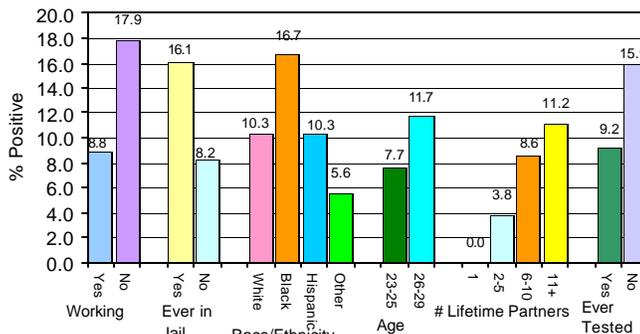


Figure 2. Responses from Participants who Tested Positive Before the Survey

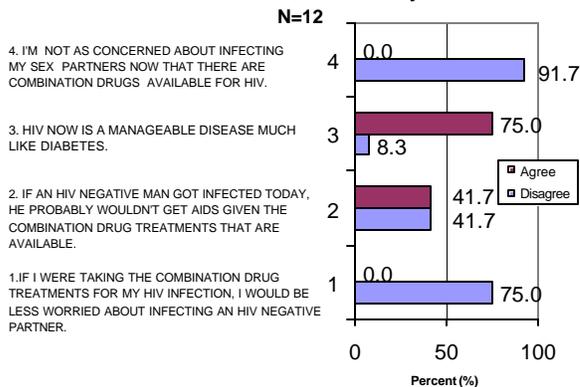
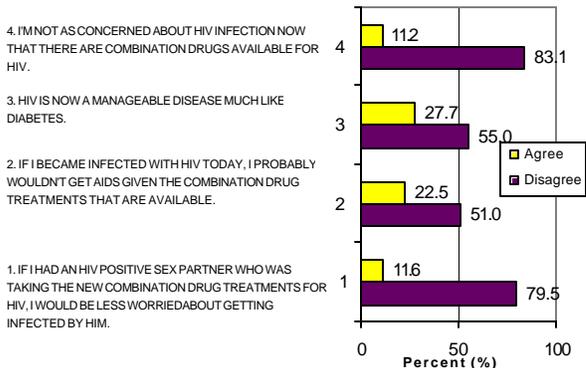


Figure 3. Responses from Participants who Tested Negative Before the Survey and Who Knew About Combination Drug Treatment



• Overall, 82.7% of the participants did not think it was likely that they were infected with HIV, regardless of their reported risk behavior. Of the 46 positives, 12 (26.1%) already knew that they were infected, of the 34 positives that didn't already know that they were infected, 8 (23.5%) said it was "very unlikely," and 11 (32.4%) thought it was "unlikely" that they could be infected with HIV. Similarly, 82.3%, or 177, of the 215 men who had unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) in the last six months said that they couldn't be infected with HIV.

• Figure 1 presents seropositivity rates by selected social/behavioral characteristics. Higher positivity rates were found among those not currently working and those who had ever been in jail. Positivity rates increased as the number of lifetime partners increased and as the age of the participants increased.

• Participants who had tested positive prior to the survey, were asked whether they agree or disagree with statements regarding new treatments for HIV infection (Figure 2). Almost half (41.7%) agreed that "If an HIV negative man got infected today, he probably wouldn't get AIDS given the combination drug treatments that are available." A majority, 75%, felt that "HIV now is a manageable disease much like diabetes." Almost all, 91.7%, disagreed with the statement "I'm not as concerned about infecting my sex partners now that there are combination drugs available for HIV," but they expressed less concern about infecting an HIV-negative partner while taking combination therapy (75% disagreed). Those who tested negative prior to participating in the survey and who knew about treatments for HIV, were asked similar questions (Figure 3). Some of them (22.5%) agreed that "If I became infected with HIV today, I probably wouldn't get AIDS given the combination drug treatments available." Almost 28% had the opinion that "HIV is now a manageable disease much like diabetes," while 83.1% disagreed with the statement "I'm not as concerned about HIV infection now that there are combination drugs available for HIV." Approximately 80% disagreed with "If I had an HIV positive sex partner who was taking the new combination drug treatments for HIV, I would be less worried about getting infected by him."

• The findings from YMS have been used to identify needs, allocate resources, and to develop or improve prevention programs that target young men who have sex with men. Results from YMS phase II have helped to identify beliefs and behaviors related to combination drug treatments for HIV infection.

1/ MacKellar D, Valleroy L, Karon J, et al: The Young Men's Survey: Public Health Rep 1996; (suppl 1): 138-144.