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Alcohol use predicts sexual risk behavior with HIV-negative or partners of unknown status among young HIV-positive men who have sex with men

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Although the relationship between substance use and heightened sexual risk behaviors have been documented in samples of young men who have sex with men (YMSM) and HIV-positive adult men who have sex with men (MSM), there is a dearth of research on the role of substance use in the sexual risk behaviors of HIV-positive YMSM. We examined associations between alcohol and other drug use with sexual risk behaviors among a sample of HIV-positive YMSM ($N = 200$). There were no significant predictors of either receptive or insertive unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) with HIV-positive partners among the substance use variables. Failure to use a condom after drinking alcohol ($\beta = 2.00$, $p < 0.01$) was significantly associated with insertive UAI with HIV-negative partners or partners of unknown status. Failure to use a condom after drinking alcohol ($\beta = 1.36$, $p < 0.05$) and age ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$) were significantly associated with receptive UAI with HIV-negative partners or partners of unknown status. Findings from this article underscore the role of alcohol in facilitating UAI among HIV-positive YMSM and their HIV-negative and status-unknown partners.

Keywords: MSM; HIV-positive; youth; alcohol; sexual risk behavior; secondary prevention

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Introduction

With HIV incidence rising among young men who have sex with men (YMSM; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Prejean et al., 2011), particularly African Americans, secondary prevention efforts take on increasing significance. One factor associated with both the initial acquisition and subsequent transmission of HIV through unprotected sexual activity is drug and alcohol use. Although, the relationship between substance use and heightened sexual risk behaviors (typically defined as not using condoms and/or having multiple sexual partners) have been documented in samples of YMSM (Celentano et al., 2006; Mustanski, 2008; Mutchler et al., 2011) and HIV-positive adult men who have sex with men (MSM) (Parsons, Kutnick, Halkitis, Punzalan, & Carboni, 2005; Purcell, Parsons, Halkitis, Mizuno, & Woods, 2001; Purcell, Moss, Remein, Woods, & Parsons, 2005), there is a dearth of research on the role of substance use in the sexual risk behaviors of HIV-positive YMSM.

The extant literature on substance use and sexual risk among HIV-positive YMSM has been somewhat equivocal, with one study suggesting that alcohol and/or other drug use was not associated with condom use during last oral or anal intercourse (Phillips et al., 2011). Another study (VanDevanter et al., 2011) reported that alcohol and other substance use was related to unprotected sex among Black and Latino HIV-positive YMSM, with participants endorsing that substance use altered judgment about engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors, specifically increasing and enhancing sexual desire, lowering inhibitions, and allowing an escape from responsibility. This brief report examines associations between alcohol and other drug use with sexual risk behaviors among HIV-positive YMSM.

Methods

This study constitutes a post-hoc analysis of survey data collected as part of a mixed methods study of 200 YMSM living with HIV/AIDS recruited from 14 clinical sites within the Adolescent Medicine Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions (ATN). Study design and procedures have been published elsewhere (Harper et. al., 2011). The study obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in order to assure subject research data safety, and the research protocol was approved by the institutional review boards at the home institution and at all participating sites.

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