

Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM) and Social Networking Apps

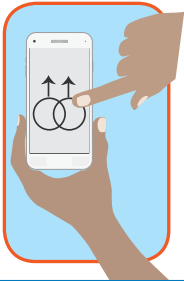
INTRODUCTION

Smartphone ownership in the United States has increased over time¹ including among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM).² Smartphone geosocial-networking applications (“apps”) are commonly used among MSM to meet sexual partners.^{3,4} Increased access to smartphones along with the common use of apps to find sexual partners led CDUHR investigator Dr. Dustin Duncan and his collaborators to study the relationships between app use and sexual health among MSM.

KEY FINDINGS

Characterizing App Use

Among a sample of young black MSM living in Gulfport, Mississippi; Jackson, Mississippi; and New Orleans, Louisiana, 76% used apps. Those who used apps reported their most commonly used apps as Jack’d (69.8%) followed by Adam4Adam (41.5%) and Grindr (35.9%). Participants used an average of 8.2 different apps and spent an average of 2.1 hours on the apps daily. Although a minority (17%) used apps to seek sexual partners, the average number of “app-met partners” with whom they engaged in insertive intercourse was 1.19; almost one third of the encounters were condomless. Furthermore, over a quarter of participants were unaware of the HIV status of their app-met partners. High levels of condomless sex and lack of awareness of partners’ HIV status warrant investigation of sexual risk taking among app-using MSM.⁵



Contextualizing App Use

Sexual risk among app using MSM was studied using a sample of 174 app-using MSM in New York City. The study addressed 6 contextual factors related to app use and investigated the relationship between these factors and condomless intercourse. A majority (63.2%) used apps when feeling sad, when using alcohol (51.1%) and when using any drugs (25.9%). Participants were more likely to engage in both insertive and receptive condomless sex when apps were being used when using any drugs or when using apps for transactional sexual encounters.⁶

Combating HIV through App Use

Apps have shown their potential usefulness among researchers and health care providers seeking to decrease the risk of HIV among MSM. Among a sample of 169 app-using MSM in London, 63.9% reported willingness to use apps for HIV prevention, and specifically apps to serve as reminders for HIV testing. Willingness to use apps for HIV prevention was higher among those reporting recent binge drinking and recent club drug use.⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

Existing geosocial-networking applications have already been used to deliver HIV-related interventions⁸ and have the potential to be used for other MSM health concerns substance use, intimate partner violence, and sexual risk taking. App-based sexual health interventions targeting MSM should be developed, given MSM’s willingness to use apps for HIV prevention.

References

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