

Gay Community Periodic Survey: Canberra 2000

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gay community periodic survey

CANBERRA 2000

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NATIONAL CENTRE IN HIV SOCIAL RESEARCH

NATIONAL CENTRE IN HIV EPIDEMIOLOGY AND
CLINICAL RESEARCH

AIDS ACTION COUNCIL OF THE ACT

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Description of the Study

The Canberra Gay Community Periodic Survey is a cross-sectional survey of gay and homosexually active men recruited through a range of gay community events in Canberra. The project was funded by the ACT Health Department and the AIDS Action Council of the ACT. The Periodic Survey provides a snapshot of sexual and HIV-related practices among gay and homosexually active men. This is the first survey to be conducted in Canberra and, as such, it will provide a useful measure against which to measure changes over time. The survey was conducted in November 2000 and these data can be compared with those obtained from gay community surveys conducted in other cities.

The major aim of the Survey is to provide data on levels of safe and unsafe sexual practice in a broad cross-sectional sample of gay and homosexually active men. With this in mind, men were recruited from a number of gay community events. In 2000, four such events were used for recruitment: Fair Day, one gay community site and two gay community events. Trained volunteer recruiters were used.

The questionnaire that was used is attached to this report. It is a short, self-administered instrument that typically takes five to ten minutes to complete. Questions focus on anal intercourse and oral sex, the use of condoms, the nature of sexual relationships, HIV testing and serostatus, aspects of social attachment to gay community, and a range of demographic items including sexual identity, age, education, occupation and ethnicity.

This report describes the data from the initial Canberra Gay Community Periodic Survey. More detailed analysis of the data will continue and will be disseminated as it is completed. As with any data analysis, further examination may necessitate minor reinterpretation of the findings.

Sample and Recruitment

Participants were recruited through three sites in the Canberra metropolitan area and at a large public gay community event, Fair Day. Just under half of the respondents were recruited at Fair Day.

Table 1 : Recruitment sites

Fair Day	168 (48.0%)
Other events/site	182 (52.0%)
Total	350 (100.0%)

In all, 407 men were asked to complete a questionnaire and 350 did so. This represents a sound response rate of 86 per cent.

Previous studies such as SMASH (Prestage et al., 1995) have demonstrated that HIV serostatus is an important distinguishing feature among gay men, particularly with regard to sexual behaviour. For this reason some of the data on sexual practices are reported separately for men who are HIV positive, those who are HIV negative, and those who have not been tested or do not know their serostatus.

Also, as indicated in previous Periodic Surveys (Van de Ven et al, 1997), men recruited from events such as the Fair Day are different in some respects from those recruited from gay community venues. Nonetheless, most of the data reported here are for the sample as a whole, giving an account of practices drawn from a broad cross-sectional sample of Canberra gay men.

Demographic Profile

Age

Respondents ranged in age from 16 and 69, with a median age of 37.

Table 2 : Age

Under 25	52 (15.0%)
25–29	50 (14.5%)
30–39	99 (28.6%)
40–49	104 (30.1%)
50 and over	41 (11.8%)
Total	346 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 4 men.

Ethnicity

As with other gay community periodic surveys, the sample was predominantly 'Anglo-Australian'. Six participants (1.7% of the total sample) indicated that they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

Table 3 : Ethnicity

Anglo-Australian	289 (82.6%)
European	34 (9.7%)
Other	27 (7.7%)
Total	350 (100%)

Occupation

Most of the men in the sample were employed, with just under three-quarters of all respondents being in full-time employment.

Table 4 : Employment status

Full-time	252 (73.9%)
Part-time	29 (8.5%)
Unemployed/Other	60 (17.6%)
Total	341 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 9 men.

As in most studies of male homosexual populations, there was a substantial over-representation of professionals/managers and an under-representation of manual workers (Connell et al., 1991; Hood et al., 1994). As might be expected and given the nature of the Canberra workforce, these differences were even more marked in this survey than in periodic surveys conducted in other parts of Australia.

Table 5 : Occupation

Professional/Managerial	
Professional/ Managerial	113 (40.3%)
Paraprofessional	14 (5.0%)
White collar	
Clerical/Sales	144 (51.4%)
Blue collar	
Trades	5 (1.8%)
Plant operator/Labourer	4 (1.4%)
Total	280 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 70 men.

Sexual relationships with women

Very few men had had sex with women in the previous six months.

Table 6 : Sexual relationships with women

No female partners	306 (94.4%)
One female partner	12 (3.7%)
More than one female partner	6 (1.9%)
Total	324 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 26 men.

Sexual relationships with men

Over half of the men in this survey were currently in a regular sexual relationship with a man. Almost a third of the study participants were monogamous (i.e. had sex only with a regular partner). Just over half of the men had sex with casual partners and a small proportion was 'currently' not having sex with men at all.

Table 7 : Sexual relationships with men

None	51 (15.9%)
Casual only	84 (26.2%)
Regular plus casual	86 (26.9%)
Regular only (monogamous)	99 (30.9%)
Total	320 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 30 men.

These data showed that almost three quarters of the men were in a relationship that had lasted for at least one year. Just under a third of those men in relationships reported that they were in a relationship of less than one year.

Table 8 : Length of relationships with men

Less than one year	56 (29.5%)
At least one year	134 (70.5%)
Total	190 (100%)¹

¹ Includes only those men who 'currently' had a regular partner.

Association with Gay Community

The men in this survey were highly gay-identified and gay-community-attached.

Sexual identity

The survey data showed that the sample was mostly homosexually-identified, with this being even more so than their counterparts in similar surveys in Sydney (Prestage et al, 1999). Homosexual identification included 'gay/homosexual' as well as a small number of men who thought of themselves as 'queer'. Non-homosexual identification included 'bisexual' and 'heterosexual'.

Table 9 : Sexual identity

Homosexually identified	342 (98.3%)
Not homosexually identified	6 (1.7%)
Total	348 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 2 men.

Gay community involvement

The men in this sample were highly socially involved with gay men. About half of the men in the sample said most or all of their friends were gay men whereas most of the rest of the sample reported that some or a few of their friends were gay.

Table 10 : Gay friends

None	1 (0.3%)
Some or a few	173 (49.4%)
Most or all	176 (50.3%)
Total	350 (100%)

Correspondingly, just over four out of five men said they spent some or a lot of their free time with gay men. A small proportion of men said that they spent only a little time with gay men.

Table 11 : Proportion of free time spent with gay men

None	2 (0.6%)
A little	50 (14.3%)
Some	131 (37.5%)
A lot	166 (47.6%)
Total	349 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 1 man.

HIV Testing

Most of the men in the sample had already been tested for antibodies to HIV, and mostly with an HIV negative result. Approximately 17% had not been tested or had failed to obtain the test results, and three men did not respond to this question. Fewer than 6% of the men were HIV positive.

Table 12 : HIV test results

Not tested/No results	59 (17.0%)
HIV negative	270 (77.8%)
HIV positive	18 (5.2%)
Total	347 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 3 men.

Time since most recent HIV antibody test

Among those men who had had tests for HIV, the majority had done so within the previous year. Almost a quarter of the men had not been tested in the last two years.

Table 13 : Time since most recent HIV test

Less than 6 months ago	106 (35.3%)
7–12 months ago	64 (21.3%)
1–2 years ago	60 (20.0%)
Over 2 years ago	70 (23.3%)
Total	300 (100%)

Note: This table includes only those men who had been tested for HIV.

Combination therapies

Of those men who indicated that they were HIV positive, just under three-quarters were taking combination therapies.

Table 14 : Use of combination antiretroviral therapies

Yes	13 (72.2%)
No	5 (27.8%)
Total	18 (100%)

Regular partner's HIV status

The participants were asked about the serostatus of their current regular partner. As the question referred only to current partners, fewer men responded to this item than indicated sex with a regular partner during the previous six months. Almost three quarters of men's partners were HIV negative and the status of one in five partners was unknown. Just under ten per cent of partners were HIV positive.

Table 15 : HIV status of regular partners

HIV-positive	12 (6.9%)
HIV-negative	127 (73.0%)
HIV status unknown	35 (20.1%)
Total	174 (100%)

Note: Includes only those men who 'currently' had a regular partner.

HIV-negative men tended to have HIV-negative regular partners. Men who did not know their own serostatus tended not to know the serostatus of their regular partners, or, more commonly, they had HIV-negative regular partners.

Table 16 : Match of HIV status in regular relationships

Serostatus of regular partner	HIV positive	HIV negative	Unknown
HIV-positive	1 (9.1%)	8 (6.6%)	2 (6.5%)
HIV-negative	10 (90.9%)	108 (89.3%)	20 (64.5%)
HIV status unknown	—	5 (4.1%)	9 (29.0%)
Total (N = 163)	11 (100%)	121 (100%)	31 (100%)

Note: Includes only those men who 'currently' had a regular partner.

Sexual Practice and 'Safe Sex'

Looking for sexual partners

The men were asked to indicate the places they went to look for sexual partners (see Question 52). The most common places were in gay bars or through friends, with this more likely to occur in the Canberra area than elsewhere.

Table 17 : Places where men looked for sexual partners

	n	Never	Occasionally	Often
Gay bar	293	54 (18.4%)	170 (58.0%)	69 (23.5%)
Beat	274	158 (57.7%)	89 (32.5%)	27 (9.9%)
Sauna	278	124 (44.6%)	121 (43.5%)	33 (11.9%)
Backroom	260	178 (68.5%)	66 (25.4%)	16 (6.2%)
Through friends	283	65 (23.0%)	155 (44.3%)	63 (22.3%)
Sex workers	254	230 (90.6%)	20 (7.9%)	4 (1.6%)
Internet	277	139 (50.2%)	98 (35.4%)	40 (14.4%)
Interstate	268	115 (42.9%)	127 (47.4%)	26 (9.7%)
Canberra area	283	56 (19.8%)	133 (47.0%)	94 (33.2%)
Overseas	263	176 (66.9%)	72 (27.4%)	15 (5.7%)

Sexual behaviour between men

Participants were only asked to report on a limited range of sexual practices (separately for regular and casual partners): anal intercourse with and without ejaculation, and oral intercourse with and without ejaculation.

Based on the responses to the sexual behaviour items and the sorts of sexual relationships with men indicated by the participants, just over half of the men in the survey were classified as having had sex with a regular male partner/s, and about the same proportion were classified as having had sex with a casual male partner/s 'in the previous six months'.

Table 18 : Reported sex with male partners in previous six months

Any sexual contact with <i>regular</i> partners	215 (61.4%)
Any sexual contact with <i>casual</i> partners	225 (64.3%)
Total	350 (100%)

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive.

Men recruited at Fair Day were as likely to have had regular partners as they were to have had casual partners. Their counterparts recruited at the other sites were more likely to have had casual partners. Such a finding is not surprising as men attending the gay sites, particularly the sex-on-premises venue, do so to find casual partners.

Table 19 : Reported sex with male partners in previous six months by recruitment site

	Fair Day	Events and site
Any sexual contact with <i>regular</i> partners	100 (59.5%)	115 (63.2%)
Any sexual contact with <i>casual</i> partners	98 (58.3%)	127 (69.8%)
Total	168 (100%)	182 (100%)

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive.

The majority of the men had engaged in sex with between one and 10 partners 'in the previous six months', and approximately one in five men had had more than 10 partners.

Table 20 : Number of male sex partners in previous six months

None	54 (15.6%)
One	75 (21.7%)
2–10	149 (43.1%)
11–50	57 (16.5%)
More than 50	11 (3.2%)
Total	346 (100%)¹

¹ Data were missing on this item for 4 men.

Overview of sexual practices with regular and casual partners

Not all participants engaged in oral intercourse with ejaculation with their regular male partners, but those who did were equally likely to do so in the insertive as in the receptive role. Almost two-thirds of those with regular male partners engaged in oral intercourse with ejaculation with their partners.

Most participants engaged in anal intercourse with their regular male partners. Just under half of those with regular partners engaged in insertive anal intercourse; and slightly fewer in receptive anal intercourse.

Table 21 : Sexual behaviour with regular male partners

	Total sample	Those with regular partners
Any oral intercourse with ejaculation	136 (38.8%)	136 (63.2%)
Insertive fellatio with ejaculation	103 (29.4%)	103 (47.9%)
Receptive fellatio with ejaculation	103 (29.4%)	103 (47.9%)
Any anal intercourse	184 (52.6%)	184 (85.6%)
Insertive anal intercourse	99 (28.3%)	99 (46.0%)
Receptive anal intercourse	92 (26.3%)	92 (42.8%)
Base	350	215

Note: These items are not mutually exclusive. The percentages do not sum to 100% as some men engaged in more than one of these practices and some in none of these practices.

Fewer respondents engaged in either oral intercourse with ejaculation or anal intercourse with casual male partners than with regular male partners. Approximately two-fifths of the men with casual partners engaged in oral intercourse with ejaculation, with this being slightly more common in the insertive role. Three-quarters of those who had sex with casual male partners engaged in anal intercourse with those partners, and again more usually in the insertive role.

Table 22 : Sexual behaviour with casual male partners

	Total sample	Those with casual partners
Any oral intercourse with ejaculation	95 (27.1%)	95 (42.2%)
Insertive fellatio with ejaculation	78 (22.3%)	78 (34.7%)
Receptive fellatio with ejaculation	61 (17.4%)	61 (27.1%)
Any anal intercourse	169 (48.3%)	169 (75.1%)
Insertive anal intercourse	115 (32.9%)	115 (51.1%)
Receptive anal intercourse	77 (22.0%)	77 (34.2%)
Base	350	225

Note: These items are not mutually exclusive.

Sex with regular male partners

Condom use

Based on the entire sample, just over one-third of the men who participated in the survey engaged in any unprotected anal intercourse with regular male partners 'in the previous six months'. At the same time, just under one fifth of all men said that they always used condoms.

Table 23 : Condom use with regular partners

	Total sample	Those with regular partners
No regular partner	135 (38.6%)	—
No anal intercourse	31 (8.9%)	31 (14.4%)
Always uses condom	65 (18.6%)	65 (30.2%)
Sometimes does not use condom ¹	119 (34.0%)	119 (55.3%)
Base	350 (100%)	215 (100%)

¹ Of the 119 men who engaged in unprotected anal intercourse with regular partners 'in the previous six months', 25 practised only withdrawal prior to ejaculation, 41 practised only ejaculation inside, and 53 engaged in both withdrawal and ejaculation inside.

HIV negative men and those who did not know their HIV status were equally likely not to use condoms with their regular partners.

Table 24 : Serostatus and condom use among regular partners

	HIV-positive	HIV-negative	Unknown serostatus
No anal	—	24 (14.5%)	2 (10.5%)
Always uses condom	7 (70.0%)	44 (26.7%)	6 (31.6%)
Sometimes does not use condom	3 (30.0%)	97 (58.8%)	11 (57.9%)
Total	10 (100%)	165 (100%)	19 (100%)

In the following table, the serostatus of each of the participants (who had anal intercourse with a regular partner) has been compared with that of his regular partner. For each of the nine serostatus combinations, sexual practice has been divided into 'no unprotected anal intercourse' versus 'some unprotected anal intercourse'. Most of the men who had unprotected anal intercourse with a regular partner were HIV negative men who had an HIV negative partner.

Table 25 : Condom use and match of HIV serostatus in regular relationships

Regular partner's serostatus	Anal intercourse	Participant's Serostatus		
		HIV positive	HIV negative	Unknown
HIV positive	No UAI	—	5	—
	Some UAI	—	3	—
HIV negative	No UAI	5	15	—
	Some UAI	3	69	2
Unknown	No UAI	1	3	3
	Some UAI	—	5	3
Total		9	100	8

Note: UAI = unprotected anal intercourse. Includes only men who had anal intercourse with their 'current' regular partner 'in the previous six months'.

Whereas most of the unprotected anal intercourse was between seroconcordant (negative-negative) couples, 16 men in the above table had unprotected anal intercourse in a relationship where seroconcordance was absent or in doubt.

Agreements

Most participants with regular male partners had agreements with their partners about sex *within* the relationship. Just under half of the men had agreements to have unprotected anal intercourse. Just over a quarter of men had agreed to condom protected anal intercourse.

Table 26 : Agreements with regular male partners about sex *within* relationship

No spoken agreement about anal intercourse	46 (25.0%)
No anal intercourse between regular partners is permitted	9 (4.9%)
Anal intercourse permitted only with condom	50 (27.2%)
Anal intercourse without condom is permitted	79 (42.9%)
Total	184 (100%)

Note: Based on the responses of men who 'currently' had a regular partner.

Most participants had made an agreement with their regular partner about sexual interactions *outside* the relationship. Where couples did have such an agreement, none permitted unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners.

Table 27 : Agreements with regular male partners about sex *outside* relationship

No spoken agreement about casual partners	68 (37.2%)
No sexual contact with casual partners is permitted	53 (29.0%)
No anal intercourse with casual partners is permitted	14 (7.7%)
Anal intercourse permitted only with condom	48 (13.7%)
Anal intercourse without condom is permitted	—
Total	183 (100%)

Note: Based on the responses of men who 'currently' had a regular partner.

Sex with casual male partners

Condom use

Based on the entire sample, about 14% of the men who participated in the survey engaged in any unprotected anal intercourse with casual male partners 'in the previous six months'. A separate analysis revealed that of these 50 men, 19 also had unprotected anal intercourse with regular partners.

Table 28 : Condom use with casual partners

	Total sample	Those with casual partners
No casual partner	125 (35.7%)	—
No anal intercourse	56 (16.0%)	56 (24.9%)
Always uses condom	119 (34.0%)	119 (52.9%)
Sometimes does not use condom ¹	50 (14.3%)	50 (22.2%)
Base	350 (100%)	225 (100%)

¹ Of the 50 men who engaged in unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners 'in the previous six months', 24 practised only withdrawal prior to ejaculation, 10 practised only ejaculation inside, and 16 engaged in both withdrawal and ejaculation inside.

A comparison of the data in Tables 23 and 28 confirms that more men had unprotected anal intercourse with regular than with casual partners. Furthermore, unprotected anal intercourse with ejaculation inside was more common within regular relationships than between casual partners.

There were only slight differences between HIV-positive, HIV-negative and 'untested' men in their condom use with casual partners, and these differences (based on some relatively small numbers) were not statistically significant. Some of the HIV-positive men's unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners may be explained by positive-positive sex (Prestage et al, 1995) which poses no risk of seroconversion *per se*.

Table 29 : Serostatus and condom use with casual partners

	HIV-positive	HIV-negative	Unknown serostatus
No anal	3 (30.0%)	45 (25.7%)	5 (2.0%)
Always uses condom	5 (50.0%)	92 (52.6%)	13 (52.0%)
Sometimes does not use condom	2 (20.0%)	38 (21.7%)	7 (28.0%)
Total	10 (100%)	175 (100%)	25 (100%)

Serostatus

Two questions (ie 32 and 33) addressed disclosure of serostatus among casual partners. These questions were included in the questionnaire to obtain a sense of disclosure and sex between casual partners. Many more questions—well beyond the scope of the brief questionnaire used here—would need to be asked to fully understand the issue. Furthermore, the inclusion of the two questions was *not* intended to endorse sexual negotiation between casual partners.

Well over half of the participants with casual partners did not disclose their serostatus to any of their casual partners. Relatively few men disclosed to all casual partners.

Table 30 : Disclosure of serostatus to casual partners

Told none	155 (66.2%)
Told some	42 (17.9%)
Told all	37 (15.8%)
Total	234 (100%)

Likewise, well over half of the participants with casual partners were not told the serostatus of their casual partners. Relatively few men were routinely disclosed to by casual partners.

Table 31 : Casual partners' disclosure of serostatus to participants

Told by none	156 (66.4%)
Told by some	50 (21.3%)
Told by all	29 (12.3%)
Total	235 (100%)

STIs and sources of information

Sexually transmissible infections

A small number of men reported having had a sexually transmissible infection 'in the previous six months'.

Table 32 : Sexually transmissible infections

Gonorrhoea	6 (1.7%)
Chlamydia/NSU	8 (2.3%)
Genital warts	9 (2.6%)
Syphilis	2 (0.6%)

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive.

Men were asked to indicate where they got information about sexual health and safe sex. The most common sources of information were the gay media, brochures and pamphlets, friends and the AIDS Action Council of the ACT.

Table 33 : Sources of sexual health and safe sex information

Gay media	213 (60.9%)
Posters and brochures	211 (60.3%)
Friends	187 (53.4%)
AIDS Action Council/ACT	180 (51.4%)
Internet	132 (37.7%)
Other AIDS organization	123 (35.1%)
Other doctor	114 (32.6%)
Straight media	105 (30.0%)
Gay doctor	92 (26.3%)
Sexual health centre	70 (20.0%)
Other health professional	68 (19.4%)
Gay counselling service	42 (12.0%)
Community health centre	42 (12.0%)

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive.

Discussion

The findings from the first Canberra Gay Community Periodic Survey conducted during November 2000 provide a snapshot of the social and sexual lives of gay men in Canberra. Many of the results parallel findings from Gay Community Periodic Surveys in other Australian cities, for example Sydney (Prestage et al, 1996; Van de Ven et al, 1997), reinforcing the notion that in some respects the gay cultures in the capital cities of Australia are very similar.

The 350 participants were recruited at two gay events, one gay site and at Fair Day. They were predominantly of 'Anglo-Australian' background and worked in professional/managerial or white-collar occupations.

Most of the participants identified as gay or homosexual. Correspondingly, most preferred to have sex with men only, reflected in the finding that 94% had not had sex with any women 'in the previous six months'. As a whole, the sample was quite involved socially in gay community with high levels of gay friendships and with much free time spent with gay men.

Ten per cent of the men had not been tested for HIV. The majority of those who had been tested for HIV had done so 'within the past year'. Overall, 6% of the men were HIV-positive.

As in similar surveys elsewhere (Prestage et al., 1999), approximately three quarters of the HIV-positive men were taking a combination therapy.

Most men reported 'current' sexual contact with at least one other man: just under a third of the men only had a regular partner; just under a third had a regular partner and either or both partners also had casual partners; and just over a quarter of the men only had casual partners. In the six months prior to the survey, approximately two thirds of the men had sex with regular partners and a similar proportion of the men had sex with casual partners.

Of the total sample and 'in the previous six months', 119 men (34%) had any unprotected anal intercourse with a regular partner and 50 men (14%) had any unprotected anal intercourse with a casual partner. Some of these men (19 all told) had unprotected anal intercourse with both regular and casual partners. The remainder of the men in the overall sample indicated no unprotected anal intercourse with either regular or casual partners.

Not unexpectedly, more men had unprotected anal intercourse with regular than with casual partners. As well, unprotected anal intercourse that involved ejaculation inside was much more likely to occur between regular than between casual partners.

Most men with regular partners had agreements about sex within and outside of their relationship. Within relationships, just over a quarter of the men agreed to anal sex with a condom. Approximately 40 per cent of men agreed to unprotected anal intercourse within the relationship. No men in regular relationships agreed to unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners.

In general, the men did not routinely disclose their serostatus to casual partners. Similarly, they most commonly did not know the serostatus of their casual partners. Two thirds of the men never disclosed their serostatus to casual partners and a similar proportion of the men were never disclosed to by casual partners.

Very few men reported having had a sexually transmissible infection 'in the previous six months', with genital warts and chlamydia being the most commonly reported infections.

The most common sources of sexual health and safe sex information were the gay media, posters and brochures, friends and the AIDS Action Council of the ACT.

In conclusion, the 2000 Canberra Gay Community Periodic Survey was conducted very successfully and has provided evidence that can be used by community members, educators, policy makers and others in developing programs aimed at sustaining and improving gay men's sexual and social health. Recruitment at the Fair Day, the two community events and the gay site attracted a reasonably large sample of gay. The resulting data are robust and comparisons with other studies are suggestive of sound reliability.

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Questionnaire