

ORIGINAL RESEARCH—EPIDEMIOLOGY

“Sexplorando”: Sexual Practices and Condom Use among an Internet-Based Sample of Men and Women in Puerto Rico

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Despite the wealth of literature addressing sexual practices and condom use among men and women, very little data are available among Hispanic/Latino populations and in the Caribbean Region. This study adds to the existing literature on sexual practices and condom use in Puerto Rico (PR) and provides comparisons based on sex given the need for more current information on the sexual characteristics and condom use rates among understudied populations.

Aim. The aim of this study was to assess the rates of sexual practices and condom use among adults, aged 21–49, in PR.

Methods. We report the prevalence of lifetime and recent (past 3 months) sexual practices by sex, as event-level condom use rates, and condom familiarity and accessibility in an online-based sample of adult men and women in PR.

Main Outcome Measures. The main variables assessed include sociodemographic characteristics, solo and partnered sexual practices, and condom use frequencies, as well as familiarity and accessibility to male and female condoms.

Results. Overall, 93% of the sample reported having been sexually active (engaged in oral, vaginal, and/or anal sex) in their lifetime and 78% reported sexual practices in the past 3 months. As in other studies Hispanic/Latino populations, reported rates of anal intercourse (AI) among both men and women were relatively high. Overall, a greater proportion of men reported condom use during all sexual practices (41% vaginal intercourse (VI); 65% receptive AI; 46% insertive AI) than women (22% VI; 18% AI).

Conclusions. These findings provide current sexual practice and condom use frequency rates that can aid in the understanding of the particular sexual health needs of Hispanic/Latino populations as well as of other groups in the Caribbean. It also serves for the development of future studies and sexual health promotion programs, including comprehensive sexual health care. **Rodriguez-Diaz CE, Collazo E, Dodge B, Roman-Rivera A, Candelaria-Rosa E, Colon-Colon M, and Herbenick D. “Sexplorando”: Sexual practices and condom use among an Internet-based sample of men and women in Puerto Rico. J Sex Med 2014;11:2385–2395.**

Key Words. Sexual Practices; Condom; Adults; Puerto Rico; Sexual Health; Caribbean

Introduction

Sexual health promotion has been defined as the “process of enabling people to increase control over and thereby improve their sexual health” [1]. Sexual health is an integral component of the right to the enjoyment of the highest attain-

able standard of health and it cannot be guaranteed without sexual rights for all [2]. A key component of maintaining sexual health is to ensure that there is current social and behavioral research on risk and protective factors for sexual health available [3]. Individuals and communities who experience sexual well-being are better positioned

to contribute to the eradication of individual and societal public health challenges, including poverty [2,3].

For minority communities, research examining sexual health is limited and therefore of great necessity [4]. Puerto Rico (PR) has one of the highest human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) incidence rates (45.0 per 100,000) of all the United States and its territories [5], and the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate HIV/AIDS prevention has been established [6]. In part, as a result of the HIV epidemic, much of the sex research in PR has primarily focused on communities at disproportionate risk such as injecting-drug users (IDUs), men who have sex with men, and HIV-positive individuals [7–11]. This has limited the amount of data available on the general population and on particular groups previously overseen in research such as women and other sexually active adults [12,13]. Apart from groups at increased risk for HIV infection, there are limited data available on the sexual health characteristics of the Puerto Rican population, in part because of the stigma related to sexuality on the island, and further research is needed [1,14–16].

Unprotected penile–vaginal intercourse is currently identified as the primary mode of transmission for HIV in the Caribbean [17] and is the second highest in PR after IDU, representing nearly a third of all HIV cases [18]. Only [19] one previous study has captured information on sexual practices from a probability sample of sexually active adults, 21–64 years old, in PR [16], but it failed to capture important demographic characteristics including sexual orientation, gender identity, and condom use, as the primary focus was on hepatitis C prevalence. More data, specific to sexual characteristics and practices, are necessary in order to compare rates and accurately represent the current landscape of sexual practices in PR and other similar populations among Hispanics/Latinos and in the Caribbean.

Aims

The purpose of this study, part of a research initiative known locally as *Sexplorando*, was to explore the sexual health characteristics and practices of males and females (ages 21–49) in PR using an online survey. Additionally, participants' rates of condom use and reasons for use, as well as accessibility and prior familiarity with male and female condoms, were explored.

Methods

Data were collected using an auto-administered online survey validated by a panel of eight sexual health experts familiar with the study population. The survey consisted of five main domains assessing sociodemographic characteristics, sexual education, lifetime and recent sexual practices including condom use, history of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and sexual health conditions, as well as sexual satisfaction and perceptions of sexual rights and sexual pleasure. Skip patterns were used throughout the survey, which allowed participants to only have access and answer questions based on their previous answers.

All data were collected via an online survey platform commonly used in anonymous surveys. Sampling methods included convenience and snowball sampling through the distribution of fliers through the University of Puerto Rico, local online list servers, and social networking sites. Other venues such as private institutions of higher education, churches, and professional and community organizations were used to distribute the invitation to the study among patients, peers, and participants of their services. Participants were also instructed to invite others to participate in the study. Individuals who visited the study website were able to read a detailed description of the research project and consent form. Although there was no monetary incentive for participation, those who completed the survey were given the option to enroll in a lottery for one of the six gift cards valued at US\$25, in compensation for their time. All study procedures were approved by the Human Research Subjects Protection Office of the University of Puerto Rico—Medical Sciences Campus. Those individuals who consented to participate in the study were then directed to the survey.

The study was open to participants (aged 21 and over, the legal age of consent in PR) and to those who reported current residency status in PR and Spanish fluency. During the study period of nearly 3 months, 1,515 people accessed the online survey. Of those, 284 participants who completed the survey did not meet the study age and residency requirements or failed to report their sex, which facilitated skip patterns throughout the survey. Additionally, because of a small sample size, participants who indicated their sex as “other” and those over the age of 50 were excluded from this analysis along with the previous 284 for a total sample of 1,108 individuals (393 men, 715 women) aged 21–49.

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