Overcoming the ambiguity of sexual partnership type:
A novel categorisation using data from Britain’s 3rd National Survey of Sexual Attitudes & Lifestyles (Natsal-3)

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4. Brighton & Sussex Medical School
5. Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry

Background

• Understanding STI risk requires knowledge not only of the number of sexual partners someone has, but also the nature of those relationships.
   reflected in the UK’s clinical guidelines on STI risk assessment
   influences PN decision-making & outcomes

• Despite its clinical & epidemiological relevance, there is a lack of consensus as to what constitutes different types of partnership

• Considerable subjectivity exists in defining partnership type

• Rendering comparisons of audit and research findings problematic.

Aims

To examine:

1. whether partnership characteristics, specifically:
    Partnership duration
    Perceived likelihood of having sex again with the partner
   ...can be used to distinguish between different types of sexual partnership

2. whether, and if so how, reporting STI diagnoses varies according to recent sexual partnership history
   ...above and beyond the number of partners reported.

Methods

Data source
Britain’s 3rd National Survey of Sexual Attitudes & Lifestyles (Natsal-3)

Fieldwork dates
2010-2012

Sample size
15,162

Age range
16-74y

Target population
British resident population

Data collection method
CAPI (face-to-face) & CASI

Response rate
58%

Co-operation rate
66% (interviews completed from eligible addresses for which contact was made)

Further details
www.natsal.ac.uk & Erens et al, STI 2013
### 36 ‘Partnership Progression Types’

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**PPT =** Recently met → Known each other a while

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Using statistics to collapse the 24 Partnership Progression Types

- **ANOVA** with rank-transformed partnership duration data to investigate if statistically significant differences in partnership duration exist between - but not within - groups.

- **Logistic regression** then used to examine whether the likelihood of having sex again varied between the summary types identified in the ANOVA but not within the summary types.

- Survey functions in Stata v.13 used for all analyses to account for the sample weighting, clustering, and stratification within the Natsal-3 sample.

**Results**

- 24 Partnership Progression Types could be collapsed into 4 groups labelled:
  1. Cohabiting
  2. ‘Ex-steady’
  3. ‘Now steady’
  4. ‘Currently casual’ (as may go on to become ‘now steady’ etc)

...according to partnership duration & perceived likelihood of sex again
Median duration & IQR of partnership duration by PPT: Women’s partnerships

Perceived likelihood of sex again: Women

**Participants’ partnership histories in the past year**

- Each participant could report ≤3 partner(s) in the past year.
- In Natsal-3 dataset, 84 different combinations identified taking account partnership order, e.g.: 
  - ‘currently casual’ -> ‘cohabiting’ -> ‘currently casual’
  - ‘cohabiting’ -> ‘currently casual’ -> ‘currently casual’
- 34 different combinations if partnership order ignored, e.g.:
  - 2 ‘currently casual’ & 1 ‘cohabiting’
  - 1 ‘ex-steady’, 1 ‘currently casual’, 1 ‘now steady’
- In Natsal-3, 15 combinations account for 97% of all men & 98% of all women

Ranked distribution of 15 partnership histories
Conclusions & implications

- Further research should investigate the extent to which the typology & thresholds apply in different settings.
- Qualitative research should ascertain the extent to which the typology and thresholds map on to both professional and lay understanding of sexual partnership type.
- We hope our partnership typology will contribute to improving understanding of what constitutes different types of sexual partner:
  - Strengthening the epidemiological evidence-base
  - Maximising individual and public health benefit.

Thank you

For further info visit: www.natsal.ac.uk or email: c.mercer@ucl.ac.uk