Representing men who have sex with men (MSM) in Britain: Evidence from comparative analyses of the latest convenience & probability surveys

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INTRODUCTION

• Convenience surveys of MSM can provide timely data from large samples of men to inform health promotion services
• However, previous research has shown convenience surveys over-represent men reporting greater sexual risk behaviours & men who identify as gay
• Probability sample surveys may be better placed to collect data from the population of MS, regardless of their sexual identity
• Aim: To compare data from 3 major convenience samples of MSM with a probability sample to examine the extent to which differences persist in Britain

COMPARISON OF SURVEY METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probability sample</th>
<th>Convenience samples of MSM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3)</td>
<td>European MSM Internet Survey (EMIS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data collection period</td>
<td>2010 - 2012</td>
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<td>Data collection venue</td>
<td>Household survey</td>
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<td>Collection method</td>
<td>Computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) and computer-assisted self-interview (CASI)</td>
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<td>Eligible age range</td>
<td>16-74</td>
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<td>Total sample size</td>
<td>15,162</td>
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<td>Participants aged 18-64, resident in England, Scotland and Wales, and who reported at least one male sexual partner in the last year</td>
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<td>All MSM sample size</td>
<td>148</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSM who identify as gay sample size</td>
<td>98</td>
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</table>

RESULTS

What proportion of MSM in Natsal-3 would be eligible for taking part in convenience surveys?
• 55% of MSM in Natsal-3 reported attending a gay bar in the past year
• 41% of MSM in Natsal-3 reported using the internet to find a sexual partner in the past year

DEMOPHRAGIC DIFFERENCES

• Median age of MSM in Natsal-3 was 41 years, older than that found in the convenience samples, 36 (EMIS), 33 (London-GMSHS), and 30 (Scotland-GMSHS)
• Participants in the convenience samples were better educated than those in Natsal-3
• Two–thirds of men in Natsal-3 identified as gay, whilst at least 85% did so in the convenience samples

DIFFERENCES IN KEY SEXUAL HEALTH INDICATORS

• Men in convenience samples were more likely to report in the past year:
  • Same-sex anal sex
  • Diagnosis of gonorrhoea
  • HIV test
  • Whilst less likely to report opposite sex partners
  • Restricting the comparison to MSM who identified as gay reduced the difference in reporting opposite sex partners, and same-sex anal sex, but many differences between the samples remain.

CONCLUSION

• We have been able to show the extent to which MSM taking part in convenience surveys differ to MSM in a national probability survey
• Greater similarity between samples exists among gay-identified MSM
• Methods should be developed to triangulate data from probability and convenience surveys of MSM to strengthen the evidence base for interventions that improve the health and well-being of MSM