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Beyond a Binary: Consistency of Transactional Sex Reporting and HIV-Related Risks Among Men

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BACKGROUND

- The objective of this study was to examine the prevalence and correlates of transactional sex among men comparing those who reported transactional sex intermittently with those who reported engaging in transactional sex consistently over time

METHODS

- Prospective cohort study conducted in Los Angeles, CA, with enrollment beginning in August 2014 and follow-up through January 2025
- Participants were eligible if they were: (1) ≥ 18 years; (2) male sex; and (3) if not living with HIV, behaviorally at risk for HIV
- At all semi-annual study visits, participants completed computer-assisted self-interviews collecting data on sexual and substance using behaviors
- Transactional sex, was assessed using the question: "In the past 3 months, have you received money, drugs, or other goods in exchange for sex?" and operationalized as a longitudinal factor across study visits as never (no reports at any visit), intermittent (reported at some but not all visits), or persistent (reported at all visits)
- Differences across the three groups at baseline were examined using t-tests, chi-square tests, and nonparametric methods, as appropriate

RESULTS

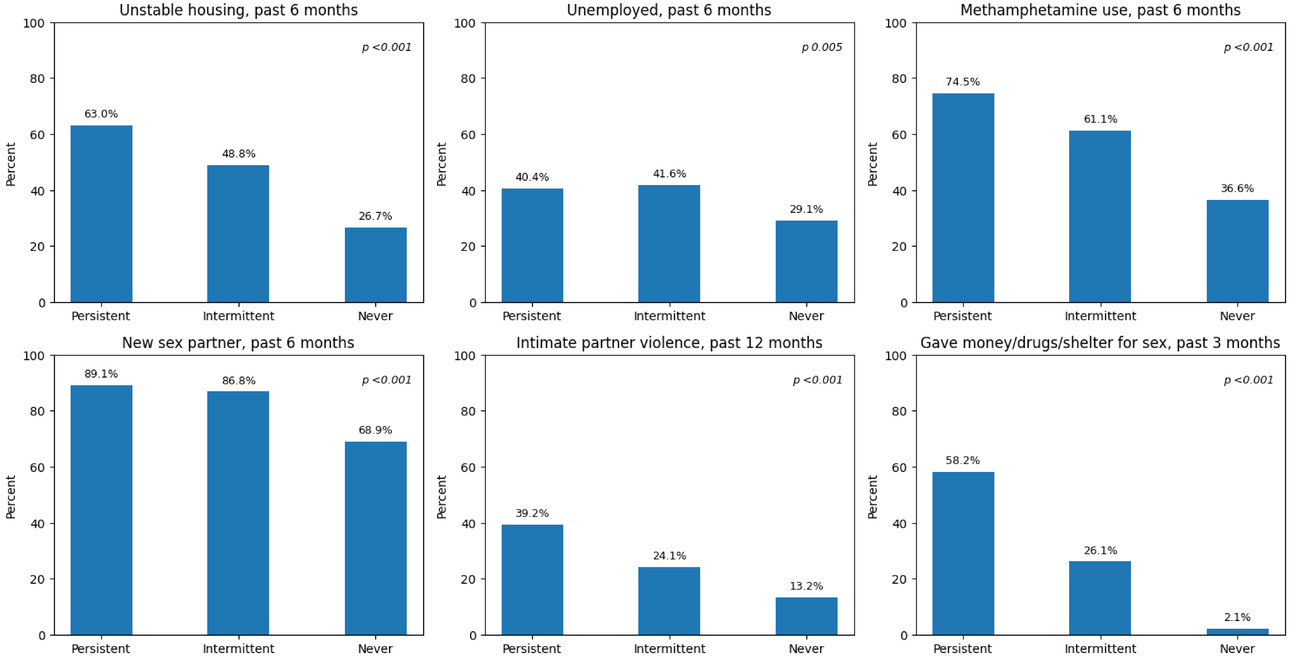
- A total of 685 participants were enrolled, resulting in 4,268 study visits, and median of 3.1 years follow-up (IQR 0.6-7.5)
- At baseline, the median age was 31 years; 43% identified as Black/African American and 38% as Hispanic/Latino (Table 1)
- Across all study visits, 62% reported never engaging in transactional sex, 8% reported transactional sex at every visit, and 30% reported it at some but not all visits

Men who reported persistent transactional sex demonstrated a dose response increase in housing instability, stimulant use, and sexual risk compared with intermittent or never reporters, identifying a group experiencing heightened HIV vulnerability and underscoring opportunities for integrated HIV prevention and care

RESULTS CONTINUED

- There were significant differences across groups, with notable contrasts between those reporting transactional sex consistently versus intermittently. Compared with the intermittent and never groups, participants who reported engaging in transactional sex at all study visits had higher levels of unstable housing, methamphetamine use, and giving money, drugs, or other goods (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Structural, Behavioral, and Interpersonal Risk Factors by Reports of Transactional Sex Across Study Visits*



*Persistent=Receiving money, shelter, drugs, or other goods in exchange for sex across all study visits; Intermittent= Reported at some but not all visits; Never=No reports at any study visit

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of study participants

	Total (n=685) n (%)
Age at study visit, median (IQR)	31 (26 – 37)
Race or ethnicity	
Hispanic or Latine	262 (38.3)
Black or African American	296 (43.3)
Other	42 (6.1)
White	84 (12.3)
HIV status	
Detectable	157 (23.1)
Undetectable	205 (30.2)
Living without HIV	317 (46.7)
Education level	
< High school	86 (12.7)
High school graduate	237 (35.1)
> High school graduate	352 (52.1)
Currently unemployed	226 (33.7)
Unstable housing*	247 (36.2)

*Defined as not having a regular place to stay at least one night in the past six months

CONCLUSIONS

- Transactional sex was common across study visits, but persistent engagement was uncommon, identifying a small, high-vulnerability subgroup with elevated risk for HIV transmission and acquisition
- Findings support ongoing screening and integrated services that pair HIV prevention and care with housing support and stimulant-focused treatment
- Men reporting intermittent transactional sex may represent critical windows for targeted HIV prevention efforts

ADDITIONAL KEY INFORMATION

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