

Factors Associated with Productive Recruiting in a Respondent-Driven Sample of Men who Have Sex with Men in Vancouver, Canada

What are the social characteristics and social variables providing a larger number of eligible recruits in a RDS sample of MSM in Metro Vancouver?

What does this study demonstrate?

- Underreported operational challenges of implementing respondent-driven sampling (RDS).
- Factors associated with productive recruiting in an urban RDS-generated sample of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in order to help other RDS researchers.
- The importance of social network size in RDS adjustment to validate RDS methods.
- Other social and behavioural variables that can improve the implementation of the recruitment strategy.

FACT BOX

Groups most at risk for HIV may also experience marginalization limiting their engagement with health services and research.

Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) is a research technique using the social networks of initial participants' (who are called 'seeds') to recruit more individuals. Seeds are first selected then given RDS coupons to distribute within their social network to recruit eligible study participants, leading a recruitment chain. This is a useful tool for accessing more difficult to reach populations.

How was the study conducted?

- The primary outcome measure was a count of each participant's total number of recruited eligible participants.
- The maximum number of RDS coupons given out by study staff to each participant was six; no participant recruited more than five eligible peers.

What are the key study findings?

- A total of 3,705 RDS coupons were issued across all participants.
- Significant predictors of individuals recruiting one additional participant included: the recruiter's network size, being of Aboriginal race/ethnicity, being HIV-positive, being sexually active with only males compared with mostly or only females, being single compared to having a common-law or married relationship, having recently read gay newspapers, having recently sought sex partners online, and reporting 'being out' to their male parent.



| Number of seed participants | Number of eligible MSM recruited |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 391 | 0 |
| 161 | 1 |
| 94 | 2 |
| 49 | 3 |
| 16 | 4 |
| 8 | 5 |

What do these findings mean?

- The findings suggest the more productive recruiters in RDS samples are likely to be men who are participating in the social and sexual networks of gay communities, and demonstrating greater community connectedness.
- Targeted seed selection and recruitment monitoring using these results as indicators can help improve recruitment.
- RDS is an important tool for the recruitment of marginalized MSM and our findings verify the importance of accounting for personal network size bias when making statistical adjustments to RDS samples.

What is the BC-CfE Momentum Health Study?

Evidence from British Columbia and elsewhere has demonstrated the expansion of access to antiretroviral HIV treatment (ART) can result in population-level reductions in HIV incidence. This is the concept behind the made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention[®] strategy, or TasP[®], which aims to expand early HIV testing and treatment to improve patients' health and curb the spread of HIV. Gay, bisexual and other men (GBM) who have sex with men (MSM) represent the most affected HIV risk group, both in BC and Canada. The BC-CfE Momentum Health Study is designed to measure changes in HIV risk behaviour, attitudes toward TasP[®] and the proportion of HIV-positive GBM with unsuppressed viral load over time in the Vancouver region. The study uses respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to obtain a more representative sample reflecting the diversity of the GBM community in Vancouver.

Full paper available online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26960428>

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