



Curtin University

Speaking safer sex:

Exploring how young Australian men negotiate condom use

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Acknowledgements

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Background

- Rates of the most common STIs including Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea are highest among the young adult population between 18-26 in Australia.
- This age group has tested amongst the most knowledgeable about STIs and condom use; yet research continues to show inconsistent condom use.
- Casual sexual relationships are reportedly becoming more common amongst this age group.
- Previous research has alluded to the importance of safer sex communication on condom use, although education and practice to support this remains mixed in most school.
- Males have also been shown as having a potential gatekeeping effect in safer sex decisions.
- It is unclear as to exactly what form, how much, and what effect safer sex communication has on condom use in the heterosexual relationships of young Australians.



Aim

- The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between condom use and safer sex communication amongst young heterosexual Australian men living in New South Wales.

Methodology

- This study was guided by a phenomenological design.
- 12 participants were interviewed.
- Inclusion criteria:
 - Single
 - Heterosexual
 - 18-26 years of age
 - Australian resident
 - Residing in New South Wales
 - Identifying as cisgender male
- Semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interviews were employed in order to investigate the lived experiences and attitudes of individuals in this demographic.
- Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data.

Findings

- Inconsistencies between attitudes towards condom use, experiences of safer sex communication, and **actual** condom use were found.

Four themes were identified:

1. Talking about safe sex isn't sexy;
2. Intentions do not necessarily predict use;
3. Knowledge and experience mitigates condom use efficacy; and
4. Safer sex decisions made based on assumed partner sexual safety.

Theme 1:

Talking about Safe Sex Isn't Sexy!

- General attitudes towards condoms were unanimously positive.
- Whereas talking to a sexual partner about safe sex and condoms was experienced as inherently awkward and un-sexy.
- Especially in casual encounters.

Like you'll say it, "like *do you have a condom?*" Not like "*can you please use a condom*" because blah blah blah blah... You just go "*condom*" and then they're like "*yep*", "*nah*". That sort of stuff. It's very quick, cause like I think if you talk about it too much it gets you out of the mood. Cause like ah we're talking about this boring condom shit, I don't really give a fuck. (Marty, 19)

...there's nothing less sexy than talking about Chlamydia pre-sex...
(Michael, 26)

Theme 2: Intention doesn't necessarily predict use

- Young men acknowledged what “should” happen and why, but several factors mediated outcome:

- Comfort
- Confidence
- Motivation
- Social cues
- Alcohol

...we were making out [and] I stopped and was like “*hang on I’m just gonna go get a condom?*” ... she was like “*what are you doing?*” and I’m like “*I’m just getting a condom*” and she was like “*what? I’m on the pill, its fine, you don’t need to do it.*” I’m like “*oh*” ... um and like I didn’t do the option which I should have done hah. (Jacob, 22)

There’s subtlety involved especially in picking up... there’s so much subtlety involved and it’s all about not saying what you should say. And one of those things you should say is like, “*Are there condoms?*” It’s definitely a social thing. (Callum, 20)

Theme 3: Knowledge and Experience Mitigate Condom Use Efficacy

- Intentions to use condoms were influenced by the individual's circumstances, education and experiences.
- Experiences of STIs and/or unwanted pregnancies influenced attitudes and behaviours regarding condoms, in both directions.

My education on the issue, plus my personal experiences, mean that STIs are something that I'm more concerned about. (Trent, 24)

...“well none of the guys I know have an STI” so it's not real to them. And that would probably be my takeaway for all of the stuff, that the more friends you know that have something or have caught something or have experienced something, the more likely you are to use condoms. (Michael, 26)

Theme 4: Decisions Based on Assumed Partner Sexual Safety

- Factors influencing safer sex communication included assumptions about a partner's sexual safety, level of knowledge and experience of them, and social and sexual scripts.

I mean, I think, after a long term relationship you've trusted the person, you obviously would have had sex before with that person, so you would probably think they don't have STDs and all the stuff like that. (Alex, 23)

...it's just this weird assumption that we're together so therefore, it just never got addressed. (Nathan, 25)

...If you're in a partnership there tends to be more trust, I think everyone has at some point fallen victim to the assumption that if you know the person they're not going to have a disease – and that's where people in relationships will often have an asymptomatic STD like Chlamydia. (Trent, 24)

So what?

- This study supports the current sexual health education programs.
- It highlights the need for education programs, health campaigns and media to focus on normalising safer sex communication.
- Increased efforts through these mediums are needed to empower young people to become informed and celebrate their intentions to be sexually safe.
- Future research is needed to continue investigating the socio-relational aspects of safer sex.

Thank You!

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