Background

• Social support has been positively linked to both health outcomes and health behavior change in many previous studies across many disease contexts.
• The same has held true in studies of coping with and managing HIV disease.

Domains of support

Researchers have tried to elaborate multiple domains of support, including but not limited to the following:

1) forms/types: practical/tangible, informational, emotional/affective support, including but not limited to the following:
• Tangible support by partners, peers and family
• Emotional support from friends
• Informational support from friends

2) sources: partner/spouse, parents, relatives, other friends

3) measurable dimensions: perceived (assessments of availability and received support) and received (actual enacted support activities)

4) contexts (inside/outside, affective, stress-induced)

5) sociodemographic and cultural milieu: gay, heterosexual, Latino/Asian American cultural definitions of what is meant by support etc.

Support for HIV treatment adherence from friends and family:

Aim: To explore the importance of support for antiretroviral medication adherence received by HIV+ men from sources in their social network other than their partners.

Objectives:
1) To do a sample of social networks in gay or lesbian social networks other than their partners.
2) To explore both perceived and received support from family, friends, and as distinct from the provision of support by partners.

Methods

To be eligible for the study, participants had to be 18 or older, had to have been in a relationship and co-residing for a minimum of 3 months, and at least one of the men had to be HIV+ and on an acknowledged antiretroviral medication (ART) regimen for at least the past 30 days.

Participants were asked to identify members of their social network, or their partner’s social network, and the support that those members did or did not provide for HIV medication adherence. For example, identifying social net- work members, participants were asked, “Do those people do anything that helps or supports you or your partner around being HIV+? — around taking HIV medication?”

Importance of affective support from friends and family.

In sharp contrast to the lack of specified tangible support, the amount of affective support from family and friends was highlighted by more than half the sample as particularly important and useful.

Results

While reliable in their sample, participants offered a wide range of support for medication adherence—tangible, informational, affective—men did not report receiving much tangible support from other social network members. Tangible versus other forms of support

Specific evidence of enacted tangible support from others in the social network aside from the partner was endorsed by only three men.

In addition to, “Do those people do anything that helps or supports you around being HIV positive and around taking HIV medication?”

Participating Men

1Center for AIDS Prevention Studies and 2Osher Center for Integrative Medicine, University of California, San Francisco, California, USA

Evidence from a qualitative study of MSM

• In work with gay men, and particularly gay couples, researchers should pay particular attention to assessing the impact of each distinct source of social support in the provision support from partners, peers and family may have different influences on medication adherence.

Conclusions

• For our sample of 20 gay couples, when an HIV+ individual has a partner, we found enacted tangible support comes almost exclusively from the partner, not other sources of support.

• This does not mean that friends and family are not providing support. Similar to other studies involving HIV+ friends and family, friends are an important source of support for gay men.

• Friends provide both emotional and informational support for HIV medication adherence. Family, too, often provide emotional support for adherence.

• Our goal was to explore the types of support for HIV+ individual has a partner, we found that enacted tangible support comes almost exclusively from the partner, not other sources of support.

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Clinical Implications

Social support for HIV medication adherence is correlated with better reported adherence and improved health outcomes.

Our work and other work has shown that partners and support is particularly vary important in HIV medication adherence. Future intervention developments would be served by focusing on detailed assessments of the sources of social support for HIV medication adherence.

Partnership participation in support; adherence and support from others, may be avenues for intervention development.

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AIDS Research Initiative

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