Does Sex Partner Concurrency Mediate the Association between Experiences of Homophobia and Poverty and Unprotected Sex among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Shanghai, China?

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Background
- At the end of 2005, 650,000 individuals in China had been infected with HIV, over four times the cumulative number of confirmed cases (141,241).
- Men who have sex with men (MSM) in China are at high risk for HIV.
- Social discrimination has been shown to affect various health outcomes.
- However, little is known about mechanisms (e.g., sex partner concurrency) through which experiences of homophobia and poverty operate in determining HIV risk among MSM in China.

Research Objective
To examine the mediating role of “sex partner concurrency” (sexual partnerships overlapping in time) in explaining the association between experiences of homophobia and poverty and outcomes of interest.

Results
Mean age in years (range, 18-56) 28
Marital status
Never married 78%
Currently married 13%
Separated/divorced 9%
Education
Junior high school or less 39%
Senior high school 36%
College graduate 26%
Self-reported sexual orientation
Gay 57%
Bisexual 38%
Straight or undecided 5%
Had a Shanghai household registration card, or Hukou 22%

Experiences of Financial Hardship, Past Six Months
- Did not have enough money for food or housing: 61%
- Had to borrow money for food or housing: 21%
- Had to look for work: 44%
- Had to find a place to live: 30%

Financial Behaviors, Past Six Months
Number of partners
Median number of male anal sex partners (range, 0-150) 2
Median number female anal/vaginal sex partners (range, 0-8) 0
Partner type
Had a steady male partner 27%
Had a steady female partner 21%
Concurrency
Had concurrent male partners 33%
Had concurrent male and female partners 17%
Unprotected intercourse
Unprotected anal sex with men 57%
Unprotected anal or vaginal sex with both men and women 13%

Lifetime Experiences of Homophobia
- Ever been experiences of homophobia: 23%
- Had lost his friends because of his homosexuality: 16%
- Had not been accepted by his family because of his homosexuality: 7%
- Had lost a job or career opportunity for being homosexual: 5%
- Had a place to live for being homosexual: 4%
- Had been hit or beaten up for being homosexual: 3%
- Had been kicked out of school for being homosexual: 1%

Experiences of sexual behaviors, past six months
- Had a steady male partner: 27%
- Had a steady female partner: 21%
- Concurrency: Had concurrent male partners: 33%
- Unprotected intercourse: Unprotected anal sex with men: 57%
- Unprotected anal or vaginal sex with both men and women: 13%

Conclusion
- Experiences of homophobia and financial hardship were highly prevalent among MSM in Shanghai.
- Sex partner concurrency did not mediate the association between experiences of homophobia, financial hardship, and unprotected sex among these men.
- We found a direct relationship between experiences of homophobia and unprotected anal sex, and this relationship remained strong when we controlled for male partner concurrency.
- Experiences of financial hardship were not related to either male partner concurrency or having unprotected anal sex.
- Experiences of homophobia, experiences of financial hardship, and male and female partner concurrency were independent factors associated with having unprotected sex with men and women.
- These results suggest that stigmatization issues and sex partner concurrency should be addressed to help reduce sexual risk for HIV among MSM in China.