Responsibility for HIV Prevention: Patterns of Attribution among HIV-Seropositive Gay and Bisexual Men

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Background

- There is a call for innovative and effective HIV prevention programs that address the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Personal responsibility has been recognized as a possible motivator to reduce risk behavior.
- Exploration of the attribution of responsibility for HIV prevention is one way to gain further understanding of how responsibility may support risk reduction.

Study Questions

- What are the attributions of responsibility for prevention among HIV+ gay and bisexual men?
- How can these findings be used to improve the effectiveness of HIV prevention interventions for people living with HIV/AIDS?

Methods

- Analysis of 26 semi-structured qualitative interviews was conducted.
- Inclusion criteria:
  - HIV-positive gay and bisexual men
  - Over 15 years of age
  - Recently infected (within previous two years)
  - English-speaking
- Participants were recruited from ASOs, referrals, and word of mouth.
- Recruitment materials were designed to increase the age and ethnic diversity of the sample.
- Duration of interview was 1.5-3 hours.
- Participants were paid $50.
- Attribution of responsibility before and after seroconversion was coded as attribution of responsibility to HIV-positive individuals, to HIV-negative individuals, or to both.
- Criteria for assigning attribution included clarity and strength of relevant statements and the number of statements in which attribution was made.

Results

- Attribution of Responsibility to HIV-Negative People
  - “And I know most of the time I didn’t use condoms, and I know sometimes I did use condoms. So I was living Russian roulette with my life.”
  - “So I would use condoms if I thought something was risky or somebody was HIV positive for sure. And other times I would just take like educated risks. And I knew I was risking myself. I mean, I had all the information and I chose to go ahead and do it anyway knowing that I potentially would become positive.”

- Attribution of Responsibility to Both HIV-Negative & HIV-Positive People
  - “You know I made the decision to sneak out of the house and to do all of this stuff you know, to put myself at risk. And you know I put myself out there. I think that you know I was taken advantage of on some level. But at the same time I know that I kinda also put myself out there.”

- Attribution of Responsibility to Both HIV-Positive People
  - “I would say talk about it. Just bring it up [HIV status] no matter how – I mean you’re negative and you want to stay that way, then bring it up. I mean it’s on your shoulders to bring it up. Even though it should be on the other [HIV-positive] person’s shoulders to talk about it. Just understanding that they got so much fear, they got so much issues, so much – all this stuff going on.”
  - “And I thought about that there was a law that’s saying that it was a crime to, you know infect someone knowingly with the HIV virus.”

- Attribution of Responsibility to HIV-Positive People
  - “Anybody that is a positive that’s dealing with someone that’s negative there is a risk. And it actually is the responsibility for that person. It’s a responsibility for the positive person.”
  - “Because I care about others…. I just can’t live happy and relaxed having it in my head I’m infecting people. I just can’t. I can’t live with that.”

Attribution of Responsibility

- Before Seroconversion
  - Attribution of Responsibility to HIV+ Positive People
    - “Because I care about others…. I just can’t live happy and relaxed having it in my head I’m infecting people. I just can’t. I can’t live with that.”
  - Attribution of Responsibility to HIV-Negative People
    - “Anybody that is a positive that’s dealing with someone that’s negative there is a risk. And it actually is the responsibility for that person. It’s a responsibility for the positive person.”
  - Attribution of Responsibility to Both HIV-Positive People
    - “And I thought about that there was a law that’s saying that it was a crime to, you know infect someone knowingly with the HIV virus.”

- After Seroconversion
  - Attribution of Responsibility to HIV+ Positive People
    - “Because I care about others…. I just can’t live happy and relaxed having it in my head I’m infecting people. I just can’t. I can’t live with that.”
  - Attribution of Responsibility to HIV-Negative People
    - “Anybody that is a positive that’s dealing with someone that’s negative there is a risk. And it actually is the responsibility for that person. It’s a responsibility for the positive person.”

Obstacles to HIV Prevention

All of the participants described personal HIV prevention transmission strategies. Several important factors emerged as obstacles to participants’ ability to enact these strategies.

- Age and a Lack of Sexual Experience
  - “And I guess I took my cue from the fact that he was far more experienced and had been having sex for 10 years already. hindsight is 20/20 but foolishly I took my cue from the wrong person.”

- Substance Use/Addiction
  - “Well, basically I was using drugs. And some-times I would use rubbers, sometimes I wouldn’t and I don’t know. It’s like you’re doing drugs your head gets fogged.”

- Survival Issues
  - “The possibility was there that I was infected with HIV but HIV was not killing me today and what was, what was killing me today was, was not necessarily killing me, but what was causing me suffering today was, ‘I don’t have a place to live. It’s cold. I don’t have anywhere to sleep tonight. It’s raining.’”

Conclusions

- Overall, participants attributed responsibility for HIV prevention to HIV-negative individuals prior to seroconversion and to HIV-positive individuals after seroconversion. In fact, after seroconversion only one participant attributed responsibility for HIV prevention to HIV-negative individuals prior to seroconversion.
- There is a call for innovative and effective HIV prevention programs that address the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- The pattern of attributions can be seen as a shift in attribution or as a consistent sense of self (or personal) responsibility.
- The findings revealed HIV-positive participants’ strong desire to avoid transmitting HIV, the strong sense of burden that participants experience as obstacles to participants’ ability to enact these strategies.
- Age and a Lack of Sexual Experience
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- For more information on parent study, Seroconversion Narrative (SNAP), see http://www.caps.ucsf.edu/projects/SNAP/index.php

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Interview Guide

Part I: Seroconversion Narrative
- Tell me the story about how it happened that you were infected with HIV.

Part II: Current Prevention Practices
- How do you express yourself sexually now?
- Tell me about the last time you had sex where you thought you might have been able to infect someone.
- Tell me the last time you have sex where you thought you might have been able to get infected.

Demographic Characteristics of 26 Study Participants

Demographic Variable

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