“Side chicks” and “Side dicks”: A qualitative study exploring typologies of concurrent sexual partnerships among black Caribbeans in England and implications for STI prevention

Sonali Wayal^{1,2}, Catherine H. Mercer^{1,2}, Victoria L. Gilbert^{1,2}, Emma Garnett^{1,2}, Lorna J. Sutcliffe^{1,2}, Peter Weatherburn^{1,3}, Gwenda Hughes^{1,4}

¹ Health Protection Research Unit in Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Viruses
² Centre for Sexual Health and HIV Research, Institute for Global Health, University College London
³ Department of Social and Environmental Health Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
⁴ Blood Safety, Hepatitis, STI & HIV Division, National Infection Service, Public Health England
Correspondence: s.wayal@ucl.ac.uk @sonaliwl

BACKGROUND

- In Britain, rates of bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI) diagnoses are highest among black Caribbeans compared to other ethnic groups (Furegato et al, 2016)
- Partner concurrency (having sexual partnerships overlapping in time), especially when condoms are not used, can enhance STI transmission probability and is more commonly reported among black Caribbean men (Wayal et al, 2017)

AIMS

- We explored:
- Typologies and social context of concurrent partnerships among black Caribbeans in England
 - Implications of typologies of concurrency for sexual behaviour and sexual health
 - Factors influencing partner concurrency in the black Caribbean community

RESULTS

- Overall 59 participants (28 were FGD participants) aged 15-70 years participated; 23 were men
- Participants of 2 FGDs were college students; participants of remaining 2 FGDs were largely unemployed
- 7 IDI participants were recruited from community settings; 24 were recruited from sexual health clinics

TYPOLOGIES & KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CONCURRENT PARTNERSHIPS

METHODOLOGY

- As shown in figure below, a qualitative study was conducted between June 2014-Dec 2015.

QUOTES: TYPOLOGIES OF CONCURRENT PARTNERSHIPS

SITUATIONAL:

F: So as far as I was concerned, even though we're not officially together, you're mine and I'm yours, especially now we're having the kid. But it didn't go according to plan, because later on down the line, when she was two, I found out that he was seeing someone else and that she was pregnant. Yeah, my daughter has got two sisters now, actually, from two different women, due to her dad. Yeah, and it was a hard time for me, because we always spoke about having another one. So it was very bitter sweet; it was like that should be my child, not somebody else's and you've broken up our family, to a degree, because you've gone outside and had kids with somebody else now. And it's not even like you're in a steady relationship, it was just a casual partner!

IDI, female aged 25-35 years, East London clinic

EXPERIMENTAL:

Int: And so when you were having different sexual partners at the same time, did your sex partners know that you had other sexual partners?
M: No, they didn't. Because it's not a relationship, because I have had sex with these girls. They would actually know that they're not the only person I'm sleeping with. I don't like to manipulate people and say, "You know what, it's just me and you, there's no-one else out there. Like, I'll just be real, know what I mean? And then if they don't like it, then they don't have to participate in anything with me. Some guys will lie to girls and say, "you're my girl, you're the only one. And then that makes the girl feel comfortable and then that will probably give her more reason to have unprotected sex with him."

IDI, male aged 25-35 years, Birmingham clinic

FACTORS INFLUENCING CONCURRENT PARTNERSHIPS

QUOTES

Int: What makes you seek out others (partners) when you've got a regular partner?
M: Oh, it's different, innit, that's why, because obviously you meet an individual partner and if you have sex with them, that sex is different to the other person that you're having sex with or whatever. I suppose you get bored of one thing.
Int: And what creates the boredom?
M: Erm ... well, it varies. What creates the boredom...how can I put it? Like say I was wearing this coat all the time and I thought to myself, you know what, I want to feel different or I want a different design, just get a different design.
IDI, male aged 25-35 years, Birmingham clinic

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL FACTORS

SOCIAL CULTURAL FACTORS

F: It's just kind of even like on Twitter, the way people speak about relationships and sex, it makes you think that there's quite a lot of people who would have sexual partners while they're in a relationship! You'll see Tweets, like, "Oh, my girlfriend is at home but I'm here doing this and that!" or, like "Oh, when your girl says she doesn't want to do give head, but you have another girl to kind of do it for you, so it's OK." So things like that, it's like wow!
IDI, female aged 15-24 years, South London, community setting

CONCLUSIONS

- Concurrent partnerships are diverse and are influenced by a range of complex psychological, emotional, socio-cultural factors which also influence condom use
- Dating apps and websites perpetuate and facilitate concurrency
- Social media and music normalise concurrency, especially among men
- There is potential for social media, dating apps and music to play a role in the delivery of culturally appropriate sexual health promotion addressing concurrency related STI risk

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IMPLICATIONS FOR SEXUAL HEALTH PRACTICE

- Concurrent partnerships can increase re-infection risk if partner notification (PN) is unsuccessful
- PN could be facilitated in 'open' and 'situational' concurrent partnerships because:
 - there is awareness of the partner's concurrency
 - partners are likely to be contactable
- PN is equally important in 'experimental' concurrent partnerships due to their short term, casual nature, which can increase the risk of onward STI transmission
- There is a need for renewed emphasis on using condoms, regular STI testing and re-testing after STI treatment for all those engaged in concurrent partnerships