



# Spot

# MSM not previously tested for HIV: baseline data from the SPOT Project in Montreal

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## Issues and objectives

MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) who get tested at SPOT come from different contexts, have different backgrounds in relation to HIV testing, have different motivations for getting tested, and face different barriers that may delay the decision to get tested:

→ MSM who are less likely to get tested for HIV are more likely to be influenced by one or more of the following factors: usually having safer practices; perceiving themselves to be at low risk; not knowing much about HIV testing or where to get tested; not feeling at ease to speak about their sexual practices; avoidance of medical clinics; avoidance of the delays involved in getting an appointment (and test results); fear of needles (Miniga et al., 2007; Lambert et al., 2006; Flowers, Knussen and Church, 2003; Myers et al., 1993).

- The most common motivations for getting tested include: having taken a risk; having an HIV-positive partner; having symptoms; being in a new relationship; having a testing routine; wanting to access to health care services (Miniga et al., 2007; Spielberg, 2003).
- One can easily imagine that some factors may be different for MSM who have been tested in the past vs. MSM who are getting tested for the first time.

To the extent that these groups have distinct characteristics, outreach and counselling for each group may require different approaches. The aim of this poster is to describe similarities and differences among SPOT participants with respect to their HIV testing history.

## Methodology

- Cross-sectional data were used from 967 MSM recruited between July 2009 and December 2010 at a community site (RÉZO) and two clinical sites (L'Actuel, Quartier Latin);
- Promotion and recruitment were done through advertisements in gay magazines & web sites as well as through outreach activities;
- Counselling was provided by either a community worker or a nurse (randomized assignment); testing was provided by a nurse;
- Data were gathered through structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires at the testing site;
- Participants who had "never been tested" or had "previously been tested" were compared with respect to socio-demographic and behavioural variables, barriers to getting tested in the past, and reasons for getting tested, using a multivariate logistic regression model.

## Results

→ 10% of SPOT participants had not previously been tested for HIV.

TABLE 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SPOT PARTICIPANTS WITH RESPECT TO HIV TESTING HISTORY - UNIVARIATE LOGISTIC REGRESSION

VARIABLES	Never Tested (n=97)	Previously Tested* (n=870)	OR (CI 95%)	p-value**
Age (M ± S.D.)	30.44 ± 11.39	35.14 ± 10.28	0.95 (0.92 - 0.98)	0.002
Annual income (%)				
< 30 000\$	40.2	63.7	3.01 (1.88 - 4.82)	0.0001
≥ 30 000\$	59.8	36.3		
Education (%)				
≤ High School diploma	28.9	16.8	0.50 (0.31 - 0.80)	0.004
> High School diploma	71.1	83.2		
Place of birth (%)				
Canada	72.2	64.3	0.69 (0.44 - 1.11)	0.12
Outside Canada	27.8	35.7		
Site where testing received (%)				
Community site	89.7	85.5	0.68 (0.34 - 1.34)	0.27
Clinical site	10.3	14.5		
In a relationship? (%)				
No	53.6	55.6	1.09 (0.71 - 1.65)	0.70
Yes	46.4	44.4		
Medical check-up in last 12 months? (%) (yes)	30.0	48.7	0.48 (0.30 - 0.79)	0.004
Test result at SPOT (%)				
Negative	97.9	98.2	1.12 (0.25 - 4.97)	0.88
Positive	2.1	1.8		
Proportion of friends who are gay <sup>1</sup> (M ± S.D.)	1.46 ± 0.90	1.95 ± 0.91	0.53 (0.40 - 0.70)	0.0001

1 Scale ranks: 0 (none), 1 (minority), 2 (half of them), 3 (majority), 4 (all).  
\* Reference group for univariate logistic regressions and for the next model.  
\*\* p value of univariate logistic regression

## Reasons for getting tested and other characteristics – Bivariate Results

SPOT participants who had never been tested for HIV were more likely than those who had previously been tested to have:

- been recruited through friends (36.1% vs. 20.7%, p=0.0001);
- come for an HIV test because they were in a new relationship (43.3% vs. 31.0. p=0.02);
- not sought HIV testing previously because they had not taken a risk (60.0% vs. 34.7%, p=0.04);
- not sought HIV testing previously because they were shy to admit they had taken a risk (55.0% vs. 11.8%, p=0.02);
- not sought HIV testing previously because they did not want to be seen in a clinic (30.0% vs. 2.9%, p=0.02);
- had fewer sex partners in the past 3 months (M=3.11 vs. 6.70, p=0.0001);
- had fewer sex partners whose HIV status was unknown to them (M=2.12 vs. 4.96, p=0.001).

Men who had never been tested for HIV were less likely than those who had previously been tested to have been recruited through advertisements in gay magazines (6.2% vs. 14.2%, p=0.03).

There were no statistical differences between men who had never been tested and those who had previously been tested with respect to:

- Socio-demographic variables (place of birth, choice of testing site, relationship status, HIV test result);
- Other reasons for getting an HIV test at SPOT;
- Number of HIV-negative or HIV-positive sexual partners in the past 3 months;
- Having had unprotected anal sex (UAS) with any partner in the past 3 months;
- Having had UAS with an HIV-positive partner or a partner of unknown HIV status.

## Multivariate Results

The following model shows concurrent and statistically dominant factors motivating the decision to get tested as well as factors that are barriers or cause delays in getting tested. The model also takes into account participant's HIV testing history (never tested or previously tested).

TABLE 2: MOST RELEVANT FACTORS\*\* FOR GETTING TESTED OR DELAYING TESTING AMONG SPOT PARTICIPANTS - MULTIVARIATE LOGISTIC REGRESSION WITH RESPECT TO HIV TESTING HISTORY

VARIABLES	OR (CI 95%) for Never tested (n=97) vs. Previously tested (n=870) *	p-value
Age (square)	1.00 (1.00 - 1.01)	0.01
Proportion of friends who are gay <sup>1</sup>	0.65 (0.46 - 0.93)	0.02
Annual income (≥ 30 000\$)	1.67 (0.76 - 3.66)	0.20
Born outside Canada (yes)	0.55 (0.28 - 1.06)	0.08
Heard about SPOT through friends (yes)	1.96 (1.03 - 3.76)	0.04
Reasons for going to SPOT: near social activities <sup>2</sup> (yes)	0.85 (0.68 - 1.05)	0.12
Reasons for going to SPOT: non-clinical setting (yes)	1.29 (0.94 - 1.78)	0.10
Barrier to HIV testing in the past: no time	0.50 (0.18 - 1.44)	0.19
Barrier to HIV testing in the past: no doctor	2.80 (0.91 - 8.64)	0.07
Barrier to HIV testing in the past: too shy to admit having taken a risk	4.02 (1.32 - 12.25)	0.02
Had HIV-negative partners in the past 3 months (yes)	0.89 (0.71 - 1.11)	0.29
Had partners of unknown HIV status in the past 3 months (yes)	0.91 (0.83 - 1.00)	0.05
Met sexual partners in an after-hours venue in the past 3 months (yes)	9.36 (1.91 - 45.87)	0.006
Had sex with a man while travelling outside Canada, or with a man who was visiting Canada, in the past 3 months (yes)	0.89 (0.45 - 1.83)	0.76
Had sex under the influence of poppers in the past 3 months (yes)	0.40 (0.15 - 1.03)	0.06
Had UAS with an HIV-negative partner in the past 3 months (yes)	0.60 (0.30 - 1.20)	0.15
Had UAS with a partner of unknown HIV-status in the past 3 months (yes)	0.82 (0.40 - 1.70)	0.59

1 Scale ranging from 0 (none) to 4 (all). 2 Scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). \* The previously tested group is the reference group for the multivariate logistic regression model. \*\*Other factors discussed in this poster were excluded from this model.

## Discussion of the Model

SPOT participants who had not previously been tested seem to have had fewer sexual partners of unknown HIV-status in the past 3 months in comparison to men who had previously been tested. They also were more likely to have met sexual partners in an after-hours venue in the past 3 months.

However, men in both groups had the same proportion of HIV-positive partners and were just as likely to have had unprotected anal sex at least once with any partner, with an HIV-positive partner, or with a partner of unknown HIV status in the past three months.

Men who had never been tested were also more likely to have heard about SPOT through friends. Interestingly, they also reported having a significantly lower proportion of friends in their social entourage who are gay.

A feeling of embarrassment about risk behaviours (and speaking about them) seems to be an important barrier to seeking an HIV test among MSM who had not previously been tested.

## Conclusion

New strategies for reaching a greater number of MSM who have not previously been tested for HIV should include:

- Inviting SPOT participants to encourage their sexual partners or friends who have not previously been tested to get tested at SPOT;
- Finding ways to reduce the embarrassment that some MSM feel when they have taken a risk, so that they feel more comfortable with getting tested for HIV and with getting tested more frequently. For example, a positive and supportive communications strategy could be developed to address this sense of embarrassment and to reinforce the reputation that SPOT staff members are discrete, respectful and open-minded.

MSM who have never been tested for HIV may not have important overall differences compared to MSM who have previously been tested, but they seem less likely to be integrated into gay social networks. They are younger, seem to be more influenced by their friends, have a lower proportion of gay friends, and are more likely to be shy about admitting that they have taken a risk.

Counselling, active listening and professional support with regards to HIV, STIs, and sexual issues appear to be key resources that need to be made more accessible to MSM who have never been tested and men who are less integrated in gay networks.

Regular HIV testing needs to be promoted to MSM who have previously been tested as well as to those who have never been tested, using both the media and social networks, in particular networks of friends. Promotional efforts need to extend into the general population in order to reach more MSM who have never been tested for HIV.

### Research Team

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