

Exploring and addressing HIV risk and prevention among rural SGM

Project within the ruralHarmony program exploring health and risk among rural sexual and gender minority individuals

Principal Investigator: Wiley D. Jenkins, PhD, MPH

Performance Site: Illinois' southern 25 counties

BACKGROUND

Dr. Jenkins research in southern IL has brought to light the barriers to health and health seeking behavior among a stigmatized group (people who use drugs). Building upon his earlier work with sexually transmitted infections, this led to an exploration of what is known about health, risks, and barriers among rural sexual and gender minority individuals (SGM). A PubMed search reveals exceedingly few articles explicitly addressing almost any health condition (e.g. STI risk, cancer screening) among rural SGM. With his current clinical trial and partnerships formed the past few years, Dr. Jenkins is in a position to begin gathering this data, which may be unique the US, about health and risky behaviors among rural SGM.

STUDY RATIONALE

This study is intended to assess risks to good health and barriers to healthcare that people living in southern IL may face – especially as it may relate to their sexual orientation and gender identity. This study will help us better understand the nature of these risks and barriers, and perhaps how they may be addressed. Different people have different things they do, friends they have, and experiences. This survey will ask questions, some quite specific, across the following categories: demographics (e.g. age, county of residence, sexual orientation); drug and alcohol use; social and sexual networks; experienced stigma; mental health; healthcare experiences; and knowledge and experience with pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Knowledge derived from the study (surveys and interviews) and relationships developed (among SGM, community –based partners) will be critical to develop a program of work and research among rural SGM in Illinois.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is two-fold. First (survey) is to describe discover levels of factors described above (demographics; drug and alcohol use; social and sexual networks; experienced stigma; mental health; healthcare experiences; and PrEP knowledge and experience) and how they vary by sexual orientation and gender identity. Second (interviews) is to explore in more depth the contextual factors influencing health and risk among rural individuals. Third is to use the data and literature to develop a R21 proposal for submission in Fall 2021 which would explore 1) the spatial scope of social and sexual networks (demographics; drug and alcohol use; social and sexual networks; mental health; healthcare experiences) and 2) how PrEP utilization may be increased among those at risk of HIV (demographics; drug and alcohol use; experienced stigma; healthcare experiences; and PrEP knowledge and experience).

STUDY DESIGN

We plan to recruit a maximum of 100 SGM and 50 hetero individuals for surveys and 20 SGM and 10 hetero individuals from among those who complete the survey for interviews. Participants will receive a \$15 gift card for survey completion, and another \$15 gift card if selected for interview).