The sexual health & well-being of MSM in Britain: Evidence from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes & Lifestyles (Natsal-3)

Cath Mercer

On behalf of: Philip Prah [1], Clare Tanton [1], Nigel Field [1], Soazig Clifton [1], Pam Sonnenberg [1], Anthony Nardone [3], Anne Johnson [1]

1. UCL Centre for Sexual Health & HIV Research
2. National Centre for Social Research
3. Public Health England

Background

- **MSM in Britain continue to be disproportionately affected by STIs & HIV:**
    - *81% of syphilis diagnoses*
    - *63% of gonorrhoea diagnoses*
    - *49% of new HIV infections*   *were in MSM in 2013 [PHE, 2014]*
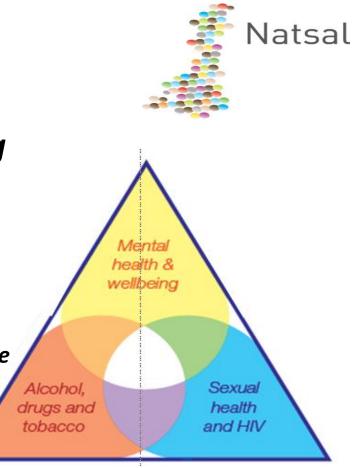
- **Also more likely to report other markers of poor sexual health, including sexual function problems & non-volitional sex.**

- **…and poor health more broadly, including mental ill-health and greater substance use.**

Promoting the health and wellbeing of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men

Summary Document

Public Health England

"There are 3 distinct but **overlapping** *areas in which MSM bear a disproportionate burden of ill-health. These are: sexual health and HIV; mental health; and the use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco."*

Natsal

Mental health & wellbeing

Alcohol, drugs and tobacco

Sexual health and HIV

'Health inequalities trio'

Objectives

1. To examine the sociodemographic profile of MSM, their health and sexual behaviours, and reporting of key sexual health indicators

2. To quantify the extent to which health inequalities overlap

For:

- All MSM (regardless of their sexual identity)
- MSM who identify as gay
- Men who have sex exclusively with women ('MSEW')

Natsal-3's methods

Fieldwork dates	**2010-2012**
Sample size	**15,162 (of whom 6,293 men)**
Age range	**16-74y**
Target population	**British resident population**
Response rate	**58%**
Data collection method	**CAPI (face-to-face) & CASI**
Further details	**Erens *et al*, STI 2013**

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Natsal-3's questions

- *Initial face-to-face interview:*
  - General health (incl. drinking & smoking)
  - Family structure when growing-up
  - Learning about sex
  - First sexual experiences
  - Use of contraception

- *Self-completion using CASI:*

  - **Recency of sexual practices with opposite & same-sex partners**
  - **Numbers of partners (opposite- &/or same-sex) in different time-frames**
  - **Characteristics of most recent partnerships**
  - **Travel & sex abroad**
  - **Non-consensual sex**
  - **Paying for sex**
  - **History of pregnancies**
  - **Unplanned pregnancy**
  - **STIs & HPV vaccinations**
  - **Drug use (incl. IDU)**
  - **HIV testing**
  - **Sexual (dys)function**
  - **Viagra use**
  - **Mood and well-being**

- *Self-completion using CASI:*

  - Recency of sexual practices with opposite & same-sex partners
  - Numbers of partners (opposite- &/or same-sex) in different time-frames
  - Characteristics of most recent partnerships
  - Travel & sex abroad
  - Non-consensual sex
  - Paying for sex
  - History of pregnancies
  - Unplanned pregnancy
  - STIs & HPV vaccinations
  - Drug use (incl. IDU)
  - HIV testing
  - Sexual (dys)function
  - Viagra use
  - Mood and well-being

MSM = men who reported 1+ same-sex partner(s) in the 5 years prior to interview

- *Initial face-to-face interview*

- *Self-completion using CASI*

- *Final face-to-face interview:*

    - Attitudinal questions
    - Household classification
    - Occupation
    - Education/qualifications
    - Religion
    - Ethnicity
    - Sexual identity

Questionnaire & further information available from: www.natsal.ac.uk

- *Initial face-to-face interview*

- *Self-completion using CASI*

- *Final face-to-face interview:*

  - **Attitudinal questions**
  - **Household classification**
  - **Occupation**
  - **Education/qualifications**
  - **Religion**
  - **Ethnicity**
  - **Sexual identity** →

Heterosexual/straight
Gay
Bisexual
other
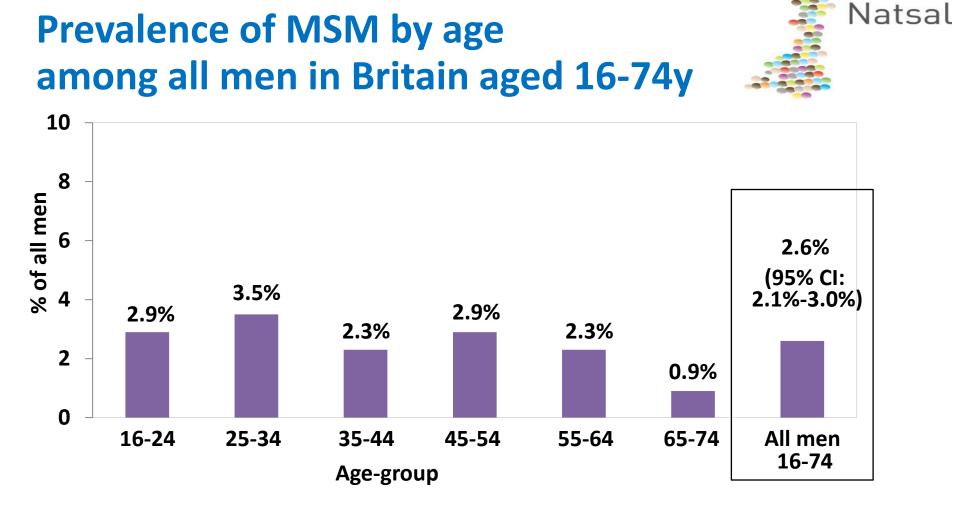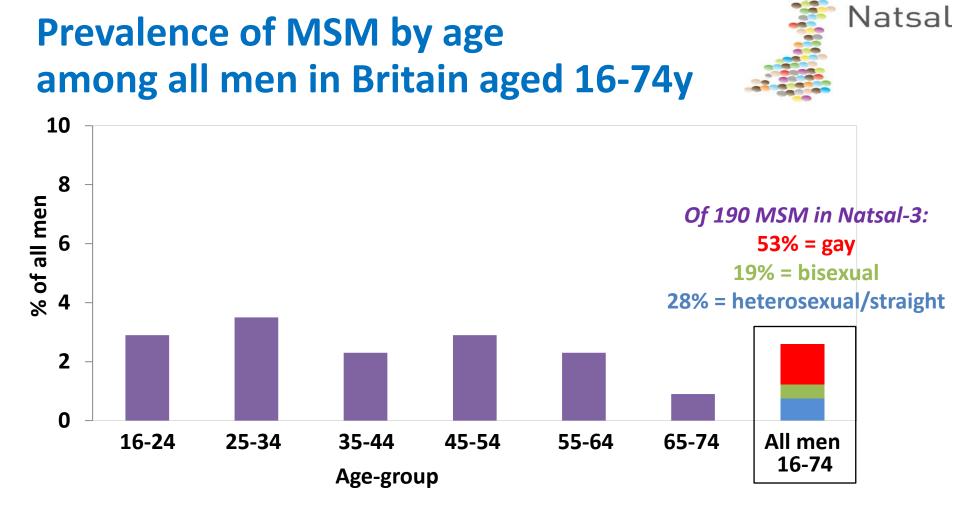
Questionnaire & further information available from: www.natsal.ac.uk

Results

Prevalence of MSM by age among all men in Britain aged 16-74y

Prevalence of MSM by age among all men in Britain aged 16-74y (Natsal). % of all men by age-group: 16-24: 2.9%; 25-34: 3.5%; 35-44: 2.3%; 45-54: 2.9%; 55-64: 2.3%; 65-74: 0.9%; All men 16-74: 2.6% (95% CI: 2.1%-3.0%).

Prevalence of MSM by age among all men in Britain aged 16-74y

% of all men — Age-group

Of 190 MSM in Natsal-3:
53% = gay
19% = bisexual
28% = heterosexual/straight

Socio-demographic profiles

Presented for 3 groups of men:

1.   MSEW (<u>m</u>en who reported <u>s</u>ex <u>e</u>xclusively with <u>w</u>omen; N= 5,069)
2.   All MSM (N=190)
3.   MSM who identify as gay (N=107/190 of all MSM)

Socio-demographic profiles

	MSEW	All MSM	Gay MSM
Denominators	*N=5,069*	*N=190*	*N=107*
Median age at interview (IQR)	41 (30,54)	40 (26,51)	34* (26,46)
Not in a steady relationship at interview	18%	**39%***	**48%***
White ethnicity	88%	**97%***	**99%***
Resident in an urban area	77%	82%	**89%***
Studying for/gained post-16 qualifications	48%	56%	59%
Religion/religious beliefs fairly/very important	34%	**23%***	27%

* statistically significantly different relative to MSEW (at *p*<0.05)
%s are age-standardised

Substance use

	MSEW	All MSM	Gay MSM
Denominators	*N=5,069*	*N=190*	*N=107*
Currently weekly/daily binge drinking	22%	21%	16%
Current smoker	27%	**38%***	**31%***
Any recreational drug use, past year	16%	**36%***	**41%***
Recreational drug use >cannabis, past year	7%	**26%***	**33%***
Injected drugs, ever	1.3%	0.7%	0.8%

* statistically significantly different relative to MSEW (at *p*<0.05)
%s are age-standardised

Mental & physical health profiles

	MSEW	All MSM	Gay MSM
Denominators	*N=5,069*	*N=190*	*N=107*
Health self-reported as bad/very bad	3%	5%	**10%***
Has a long-standing illness/disability/infirmity	30%	**38%***	**44%***
Treated for depression in past year	6%	**14%***	**20%***
No. of chronic conditions reported:			
1	22%	26%	**28%***
2+	12%	16%	**23%***

Mental & physical health profiles

	MSEW	All MSM	Gay MSM
Denominators	*N=5,069*	*N=190*	*N=107*
Health self-reported as bad/very bad	3%	5%	**10%***
Has a long-standing illness/disability/infirmity	30%	**38%***	**44%***
Treated for depression in past year	6%	**14%***	**20%***
No. of chronic conditions reported:			
1	22%	26%	**28%***
2+	12%	16%	**23%***

Sexual health profiles

Less likely — MSEW — More likely

Measure	Group	
2+ unprotected sex partners, past yr	All MSM	Gay MSM
STI risk perceived as: "Quite a lot"/"Great"	All MSM	Gay MSM
HIV risk perceived as: "Quite a lot"/"Great"	All MSM	Gay MSM
Sexual health clinic attendance, past 5 yrs	All MSM	Gay MSM
HIV test, past 5 yrs	All MSM	Gay MSM
STI diagnosis/es, past 5 yrs	All MSM	Gay MSM

Age-adjusted OR (95% CI)

0.1   1   10

Sexual health profiles

Sexual health profiles

Less likely ← MSEW → More likely

		Age-adjusted OR (95% CI)
2+ unprotected sex partners, past yr	All MSM / Gay MSM	
STI risk perceived as: "Quite a lot"/"Great"	All MSM / Gay MSM	
HIV risk perceived as: "Quite a lot"/"Great"	All MSM / Gay MSM	
Sexual health clinic attendance, past 5 yrs	All MSM / Gay MSM	
HIV test, past 5 yrs	All MSM / Gay MSM	
STI diagnosis/es, past 5 yrs	All MSM / Gay MSM	

0.1   1   10

Age-adjusted OR (95% CI)

Sexual health profiles

Less likely ← | MSEW | **More likely** →

Category	Group	Value
2+ unprotected sex partners, past yr	All MSM	
	Gay MSM	
STI risk perceived as: "Quite a lot"/"Great"	All MSM	
	Gay MSM	
HIV risk perceived as: "Quite a lot"/"Great"	All MSM	
	Gay MSM	
Sexual health clinic attendance, past 5 yrs	All MSM	= 36%
	Gay MSM	= 48%
HIV test, past 5 yrs	All MSM	= 42%
	Gay MSM	= 56%
STI diagnosis/es, past 5 yrs	All MSM	= 16%
	Gay MSM	= 20%

Age-adjusted OR (95% CI)

0.1   1   10

Natsal

Sexual health profiles

Less likely · MSEW · More likely

Age-adjusted OR (95% CI)

Poorer sexual function according to the Natsal-SF — All MSM / Gay MSM

Dissatisfied with sex life: "Agree"/"Agree strongly" — All MSM / Gay MSM

Taken drugs to assist sexual performance, past yr — All MSM / Gay MSM

Experienced attempted non-volitional sex, ever — All MSM / Gay MSM

0.1 · 1 · 10

Operationalising PHE's 'health inequalities trio'

Reporting:
being treated for depression (past yr)

Reporting:
any recreational drug use (past yr)
&/or
binge drinking at least weekly
&/or
currently a heavy smoker

Reporting:
2+ unprotected sex partners (past yr)
&/or
in lowest quintile of Natsal-SF *or if not*
sexually-active: **being dissatisfied/**
distressed/worried with sex life
&/or
experiencing attempted non-
volitional sex (ever)

Mental health & wellbeing

Alcohol, drugs and tobacco

Sexual health and HIV

Natsal

Quantifying PHE's 'health inequalities trio'

All MSM

Poor mental health

Poor sexual health

Substance use

19.1%

6.1%

0.2%

6.2%

2.3%

29.6%

13.6%

Natsal

Quantifying PHE's 'health inequalities trio'

All MSM

Poor mental health

Poor sexual health

6.2% of all MSM

Reported all 3 health inequalities

Substance use

Quantifying PHE's 'health inequalities trio'

All MSM

Poor mental health

Poor sexual health

2.3%

Poor mental health **&** substance use *(but not poor sexual health)*

Substance use

Quantifying PHE's 'health inequalities trio'

All MSM

Poor mental health

Poor sexual health

6.1%

Poor sexual health **&** poor mental health *(but not substance use)*

Substance use

Quantifying PHE's 'health inequalities trio'

All MSM

Poor mental health

Poor sexual health

29.6%

Poor sexual health **&** substance use *(but not poor mental health)*

Substance use

Multiple health inequalities

All MSM

Poor mental health

Poor sexual health

19.1%

6.1%

0.2%

6.2%

2.3%

29.6%

13.6%

Substance use

MSEW

Poor mental health

Poor sexual health

15.7%

1.2%

1.3%

1.8%

1.5%

12.0%

22.9%

43.7%

Substance use

46% of all MSM reported 2+ health inequalities

... vs. **16% of MSEW**

Natsal

Multiple health inequalities

All MSM

Poor mental health   Poor sexual health

19.1%

6.1%

0.2%

6.2%

2.3%

29.6%

13.6%

Substance use

Gay MSM

Poor mental health   Poor sexual health

14.0%

8.0%

0.3%

9.6%

3.5%

23.5%

16.4%

Substance use

46% of *gay* MSM reported
2+ health inequalities
with 10% of
gay MSM
reporting all 3

Conclusions & implications

Conclusions

- **Natsal provides useful reference data for the population of *all* MSM in Britain and allows comparisons with MSEW.**

- **While Natsal-3 includes relatively few MSM, especially when stratifying by sexual identity, many statistically significant differences with MSEW are evident.**

- **Although MSM are a small proportion of all men in Britain, as a population they experience a disproportionate burden of health inequalities.**

Implications

- As MSM are more likely to report *multiple* health inequalities, interventions that adopt a holistic approach are needed.

- Interventions are also needed that are appropriate for MSM who do not identify as gay.

- *Timely data given that the BASHH UK National Guidelines on the Sexual Health Care of MSM are being written tomorrow…*

Thank you

- **Participants**
- **Interviewers**

- **Research team**
- **Funders**

Natsal-3 is a collaboration between:

The study was funded through grants from:

With additional funding from:

For further info visit: www.natsal.ac.uk or email: c.mercer@ucl.ac.uk