

# Associations Between Sexual Partnership Characteristics and STD Risk Among Black MSM

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## RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the main correlates of STD risk among black men who have sex with men (MSM). A number of studies have shown that black MSM have been found to engage in more STD risk behaviors, and it has been suggested that sexual partnership characteristics may account for this disparity.<sup>1-5</sup>

Thus this research will explore whether partnership sexual characteristics such as having younger or older partners, familiarity with partners and having more or less educated partners can possibly explain STD risk among black MSM.

## HYPOTHESIS

- Having an older sex partner will increase the likelihood of having had an STD.
- Having a greater number of lifetime sexual partners in his lifetime will increase the likelihood of having had an STD.

## METHODS

### Participants

Individuals (N=1,542) who presented for care at a publicly funded STI clinic in Jackson, MS, were enrolled between January and June 2011. Eligibility criteria included: 1) being at least 18 years of age, 2) presenting for STI/HIV screening, 3) willing to complete a 30-minute computerized survey, and 4) speaking English. All patients presenting at the clinic during the study period were offered an opportunity to participate, and 93% of those invited completed the survey. Participants did not receive compensation for their participation. The survey included questions about demographic, behavioral, structural and social factors. The study population was 96% Black. For this study, we selected men who reported that they had sex with men. Participants were asked about their three most recent partners, and an event level (where the event was a report on each partner) data set was created which had 169 events.

### Measures

A binary dependent variable indicated whether the participant ever had an STD. Independent variables included age group, whether the participant was older or younger than his partner, whether the participant had more or less education than his partner, number of sex partners in his lifetime and whether the relationship between the participant and his partner had been a one-night stand.

Logistic regression analysis with robust standard errors was used to correct for the clustering of the data. In other words, partners were clustered within participants because each participant could report on multiple partners.

## RESULTS

The results indicated that MSM who had an older partner were more likely to have had an STD (Figure 1). It may be that in relationships with older partners, young MSM may be less likely to protect against STDs, increasing the risk of contracting an STD. In addition, Black MSM who had partners that were more highly educated than them had a lower likelihood of having an STD.

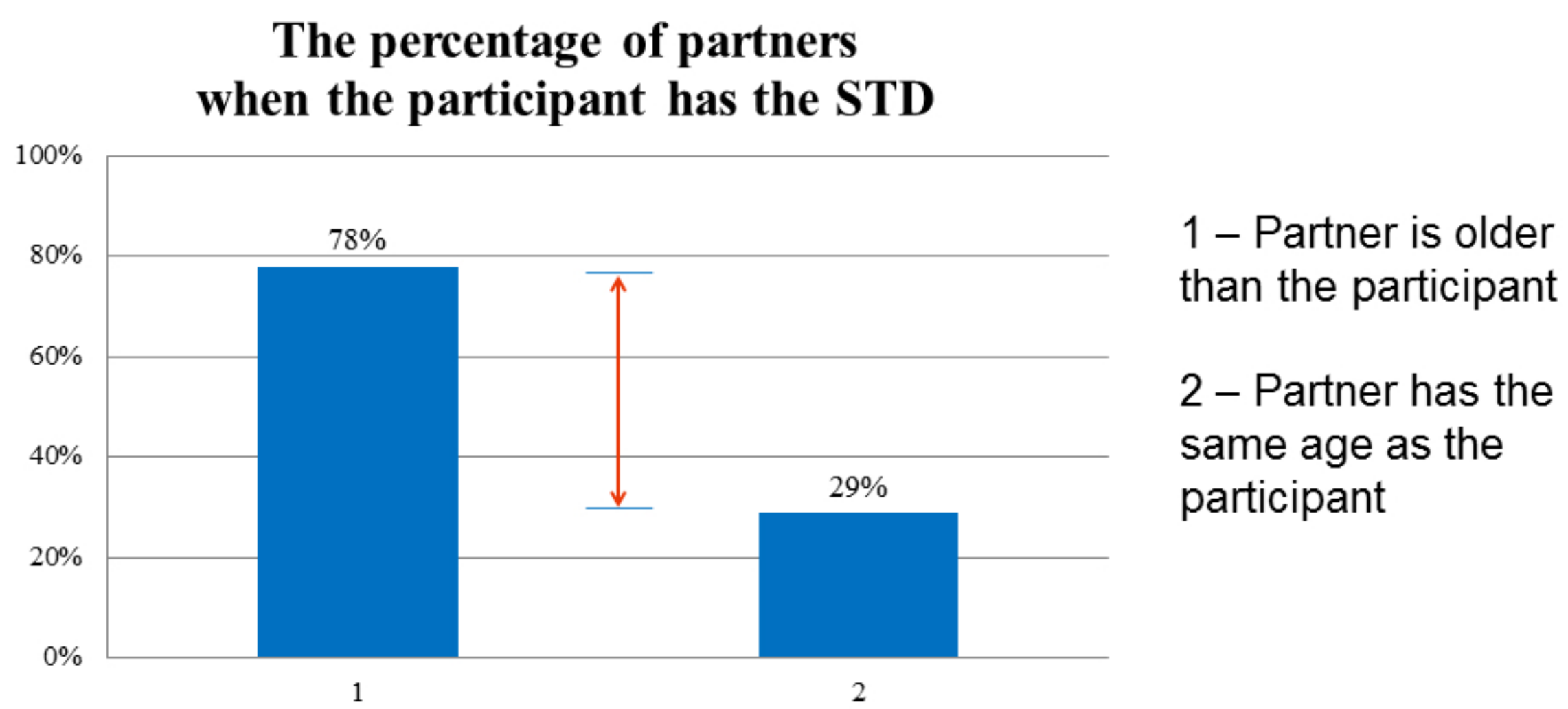


Figure 1

The next main finding of our study is that participants who had more lifetime partners were significantly more likely report having had an STD (Figure 2).

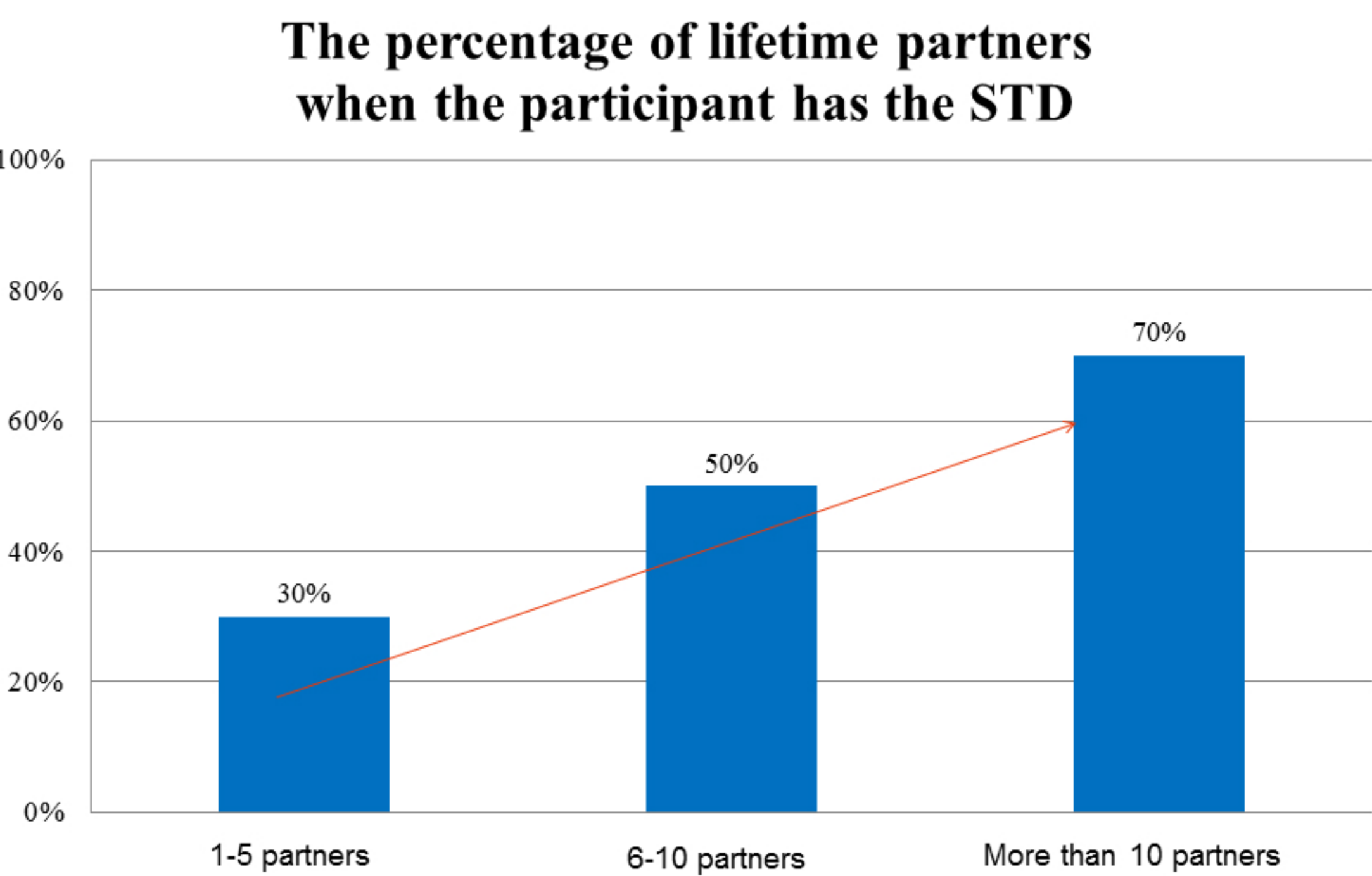


Figure 2

Finally, we found that participants who reported that the relationship with their partner was a one-night stand were more likely to report having had an STD. More specifically, when the participant had a one-night stand, he was 2.5 times more likely to have STD compared to participants who did not have a one-night stand. It is important to note, however, that Black MSM reporting one night stands are more likely to be in concurrent sexual relationships, so exposure to STDs might have come from partners other than those with whom the participant had had a one night stand.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies that were done in this field. We found that age discrepancy, education discrepancy, number of lifetime partners and having one-night stands were significantly associated with STD risk. Having older, more educated partners may affect the dynamic of the relationship such that younger or less educated MSM are more likely to follow their partners lead in protection against STDs. However, further research is necessary to determine whether this hypothesis is supported. Future studies may want to investigate both the direct and indirect relationships between sexual partnership characteristics and STDs in order to determine how these partner characteristics influence STD risk.

## LIMITATIONS

1. Our data do not have enough participants with a positive HIV result to examine HIV risk.
2. We are not able to tell if the participant got an STD after he had sex with his partner or before he had sex with his partner.
3. It is not possible to test whether the associations in this study are different for other MSM race groups because the study population was 96% Black.
4. The lack of racial diversity also did not allow us to determine whether STD risk differed in more racially homophilous sexual networks.

## REFERENCES

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