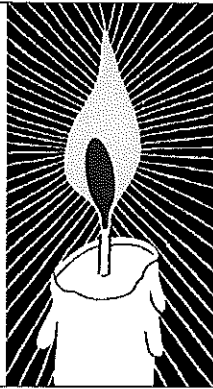


# RAP\* Time



## RURAL CENTER *for* AIDS/STD PREVENTION

A JOINT PROJECT OF  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY,  
AND UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

\*Rural AIDS/STD prevention. rap (rap) v. *Slang*. To talk freely and openly

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## STIs are viewed as unjustifiably risky relative to other risky health behaviors

STIs have been stigmatized and considered a blemish on one's character. Stigmatization prevents those with STIs from seeking care, endangers fear of those who have STIs, causes prejudice against entire groups, and has led to violence against stigmatized groups.

The stigmatization of STIs and risky behavior leads to increases--not decreases--in risk behaviors. Sex may be perceived as having levels of risk out of proportion to the actual risk of the behavior, and may be viewed as having higher risk probability than actually exists. Partnered sex itself may be viewed as riskier than other activities of objectively equal or greater risk.

This study examined if people are especially likely to overestimate STI risk and to be even more inaccurate in their perceptions of STI risk than of other risks.

### Methodology

Participants were the volunteers (681 persons, 78% female) from Craigslist and completed a questionnaire. The study had 3 parts: #1) participants estimated the risk of death as a result of contracting HIV from one instance of unprotected sex relative to the risk of death from an automobile crash;

#2) participants read vignettes in which a person unknowingly transmitted an STI and nonsexual disease (H1N1 swine flu); #3) state-level and driving websites were reviewed for risk-reduction suggestions.

### Outcomes of the Study

81% White, 5% African American, 3% Latina/o, and 3% Asian American. Average was 34.6 years.

Major findings include:

- Participants overestimated the risk of how many people would die as a result of contracting HIV through one sexual encounter and as would die in a car crash from driving from Detroit to Chicago. They viewed unprotected sex as more risk than the more mundane, but more dangerous activity of driving.
- Participants viewed a person transmitting chlamydia as more selfish, risky and dumb than one who transmitted H1N1. With treatment, the outcomes of chlamydia are much less than H1N1.
- The stigma of transmitting chlamydia to someone was greater than that of transmitting fatal H1N1 when both persons were equally knowledgeable about their own symptoms.

- STI prevention was mentioned on 43/50 state public health websites: 31 mentioned abstinence as most effective method of avoiding STIs.
- Accident prevention was mentioned on 39/50 state Department of Motor Vehicle websites: none mentioned not driving as mean to avoid crashes.

### Implications for Prevention

The study found that the extremity of negative perceptions of STIs and behaviors which lead to STI transmission (i.e. sexual behavior) were objectively unwarranted. Sexual behavior was perceived as riskier than other risky health behaviors.

Unprotected sex was considered more risky than driving. Persons unknowingly transmitting chlamydia were perceived more negatively than the person who transmitted H1N1. Public health websites promote sexual activity as riskier than driving.

### SOURCE:

Conley, T. D., et al. (2015). Sexuality-related risks are judged more harshly than comparable health risks. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 27: 508-521.

### Douche-formulated RMK desirable but some concerns

Rectal douching prior anal sex is common. Rectal microbicides (RM) formulated as douches may be a convenient alternative to gels. 12 Focus groups and 36 interviews were conducted.

Support for a douche-formulated RM centered on precoital hygiene and HIV protection. It was believed that a deep penetrating liquid douche would provide greater HIV protection than a gel.

Perceived drawbacks included rectal dryness, impracticality and portability issues, and potential side effects. Non-commercial douching apparatus use was common: e.g. telephone style showerheads, plastic soda bottles, hair dryer bottles, and syringes. Liquids were used for douching: e.g. lemon juice, tap water, soap and water, camphor, vinegar, mixture of soap, bleach, isopropyl alcohol, chamomile water, detergent, shampoo, and commercial alcohol.

SOURCE: Galea, J. T., et al. (2014). Rectal douching and implications for rectal microbicides among populations vulnerable to HIV in South America: A qualitative study. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 90 33-35.

### Social media and text messaging increased STD knowledge

The use of social media and text messaging is increasing, yet it is unclear how effective education transmitted via these mechanisms is for reducing sexual risk behavior. A systematic review of the scientific literature (11 studies) was conducted to examine the effectiveness of social media and text messaging interventions designed to increase STD knowledge, increase screening/testing, decrease risky sexual behaviors, and reduce the incidence of STDs among 15-24 year olds.

The review suggested that social media and text messaging may be promising approaches for effectively increasing STD knowledge among young men and women. However, results were mixed on whether the interventions reduced sexual risk behaviors and increased STD screening and testing. The evidence for effect was weak.

Several of the studies had limitations such as reliance on self-reported data, small sample sizes, poor retention, low generalizability, and low analytic rigor.

SOURCE: Jones, K., et al. (2014). The impact of health education transmitted via social media or text messaging on adolescent and young adult risk sexual behavior: A systematic review of the literature. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 41, 413-419.

### GW more likely found in persons with 5+ lifetime partners

The prevalence and correlates of self-reported genital warts (GW) among men and women (N=16,959) in the Baltic countries was assessed via questionnaires. Lifetime diagnosis prevalence of GW for women and men was 3 and 2.4, respectively. First diagnosis was 26.5 years for women and 24.5 years for men. Lifetime STI history and a higher number of lifetime sexual partners (5+) was associated with GW diagnosis.

SOURCE: Uuskula, A., et al. (2015). The prevalence of genital warts in the Baltic countries: Findings from national cross-sectional surveys in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 91, 55-60.

### Surveillance reports are incomplete

CDC STI surveillance reports captures only part of STI problem. Many cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis continue to go undiagnoses and unreported and other STDs, such as HPV, herpes simplex virus, and trichomoniasis, are not routinely reported to CDC.

SOURCE: CDC. (2015). Reported STDs in the United States. Atlanta, GA.

**RAP\* Time** is a monthly AIDS/STD prevention bulletin published by the Rural Center for AIDS/STD Prevention (RCAP) at Indiana University, Bloomington. RCAP is a joint project of Indiana University, University of Arizona, and University of Kentucky. The major focus of RCAP is the promotion of HIV/STD prevention in rural America, with the goal of reducing HIV/STD incidence.

The opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the cooperating universities.

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