

Coercive sex as a mode of HIV acquisition among a cohort of women with HIV in Canada: an under-recognized public health concern

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BACKGROUND

- Worldwide, women experience coercive sex (i.e. non-consensual sex) at alarmingly high rates, due to entrenched gender and social inequities.
- The aim of our study was to assess the proportion of and factors associated with HIV acquisition via coercive sex among women with HIV enrolled in the Canadian HIV Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Cohort Study (CHIWOS).

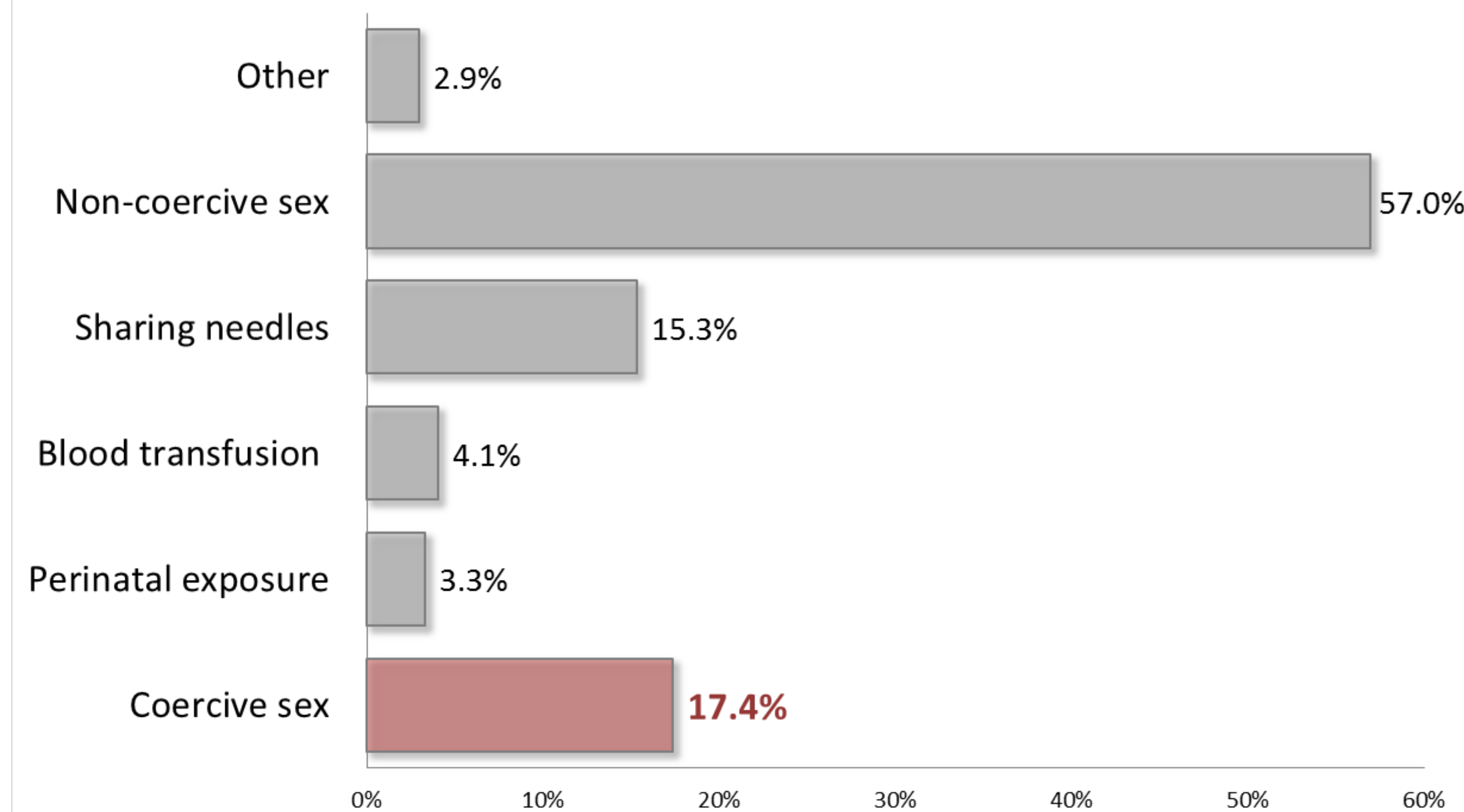
METHODS

- CHIWOS is a longitudinal community-based research study enrolling over 1,400 (self-identified) women, 16 years of age or older, living with HIV in British Columbia (BC), Ontario (ON), and Québec (QC).
- Peer Research Associates (women living with HIV) administer a comprehensive, online questionnaire to participants to collect socio-demographic, behavioral, and clinical information including data on sexual health and experiences at baseline and 18-months.
- Coercive sex was assessed through self-report of 'non-consensual sex' as mode of HIV acquisition or sexual violence as a child, or adult resulting in HIV.
- Univariate logistic regression analyses examined the relationship between coercive vs. consensual sex as the mode of HIV acquisition.

RESULTS

- A total of 1,363 HIV-infected women were considered for this study.
- Of these, 104 were excluded since the self-reported method of HIV acquisition was unknown.
- Reasons for HIV acquisition among the remaining 1,259 women analyzed were: **Coercive sex was the second most frequent mode of HIV transmission at 17% (N=219) (vs. 57%-consensual sex, 15%-sharing needles, 4%-blood transfusion, 3%-perinatal, 3%-other).**
- Amongst those who reported coercive sex as their mode of HIV acquisition, 77 (35%) reported the assault occurring during a time of war.
- After excluding those in the *Other* category, there were 936 women that were included in univariate analyses. Of this total, median age at the time of the interview was 42 years (Q1 – Q3: 35-50), and 39 % self-identified as Caucasian, 30% African/Caribbean/Black Canadian, 22% Aboriginal and 9% Other.

SELF-REPORTED METHODS OF HIV ACQUISITION



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- In univariate analyses, covariates significantly associated with acquiring HIV from coercive vs. consensual sex included:

Table 1.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Women acquiring HIV through Coercive Sex vs Non-Coercive Sex

| Characteristics | n | Coercive sex N=219 | Non-coercive sex N=717 | p | Unadjusted OR (95% CI) |
|---|-----|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------|---------------------------|
| | | | | | |
| Age (at interview), median (IQR) yr | 935 | 42(35-49) | 42(35-50) | 0.353 | 1.41(1.27-1.57) |
| Age (at interview) | | | | | |
| 1:[16-30) | 75 | 20(26.7) | 55(73.3) | 0.353 | 0.84(0.47-1.48) |
| 2:[30-40) | 322 | 75(23.3) | 247(76.7) | | 0.96(0.54-1.71) |
| 3:[40-50) | 290 | 75(25.9) | 215(74.1) | | 0.68(0.37-1.23) |
| 4:[50+) | 248 | 49(19.8) | 199(80.2) | | 1.0 |
| Province | | | | | |
| 1:BC | 205 | 67(32.7) | 138(67.3) | <0.001 | 1.44(0.94-2.2) |
| 2:ON | 513 | 97(18.9) | 416(81.1) | | 1.0 |
| 3:QC | 218 | 55(25.2) | 163(74.8) | | 0.69(0.47-1.01) |
| Sexual orientation | | | | | |
| Heterosexual | 828 | 211(23.5) | 685(76.5) | 0.038 | 1.01(0.4-2.55) |
| Lesbian/Gay/Queer/Two-spirited/Bisexual/Questioning | 81 | 8(20.5) | 31(79.5) | | 1.75(0.63-4.84) |
| Other | 27 | | | | 1.0 |
| Born in Canada | | | | | |
| Yes | 584 | 109(18.7) | 475(81.3) | <0.001 | 1.0 |
| No | 350 | 110(31.4) | 240(68.6) | | 2(1.47-2.72) |
| Legal Status | | | | | |
| Canadian | 739 | 141(19.1) | 598(80.9) | <0.001 | 1.0 |
| Refugee/claimant/Other | 193 | 75(38.9) | 118(61.1) | | 2.7(1.91-3.8) |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Aboriginal | 202 | 46(22.8) | 156(77.2) | <0.001 | 1.55(1.01-2.38) |
| Caucasian | 369 | 59(16) | 310(84) | | 1.0 |
| African/Caribbean/Black | 278 | 98(35.3) | 180(64.7) | | 2.86(1.97-4.15) |
| Other | 87 | 16(7.31) | 71(9.9) | | 1.18(0.64-2.18) |
| Education | | | | | |
| <High school | 100 | 36(36) | 64(64) | 0.003 | 2(1.29-3.11) |
| >=High school | 834 | 183(21.9) | 651(78.1) | | 1.0 |
| Ever in foster care | | | | | |
| Yes | 143 | 56(39.2) | 87(60.8) | <0.001 | 2.47(1.7-3.61) |
| No | 789 | 163(20.7) | 626(79.3) | | 1.0 |
| IDU ever | | | | | |
| Yes | 192 | 62(32.3) | 130(67.7) | <0.001 | 2.4(1.45-3.98) |
| No | 169 | 28(16.6) | 141(83.4) | | 1.0 |
| Ever ARTs | | | | | |
| Yes | 792 | 199(25.1) | 593(74.9) | 0.002 | 1.0 |
| No | 115 | 14(12.2) | 101(87.8) | | 0.41(0.23-0.74) |
| Hep C | | | | | |
| Yes | 201 | 62(30.8) | 139(69.2) | 0.006 | 1.64(1.16-2.32) |
| No | 730 | 156(21.4) | 574(78.6) | | 1.0 |

CONCLUSIONS

- Coercive sex is an under-considered HIV risk factor among women.
- Given the high rates of self-reported coercive sex as a mode of HIV acquisition, it should be considered a distinct HIV risk factor, and reported separately from heterosexual transmission.
- The intersecting social determinants associated with coercive sex as an HIV risk factor warrant particular attention by policy makers and care providers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge all of the women living with HIV who participate in CHIWOS; the national team of Peer Research Associates, Co-investigators, and Collaborators; the national Steering Committee, provincial Community Advisory Boards, and Aboriginal Advisory Board; the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS for data support and analysis; and all the partnering organizations (75+) who support study recruitment and operations.