

Comparison of sexual behaviour data collection methods used to collect data on sexual activity and sexual partnerships during a Microbicide Feasibility Study in rural KwaZulu Natal.

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Background: During a microbicide feasibility study, data was collected using both face-to-face and secret-voting methods in order to assess the impact of social desirability bias on reporting of sexual behaviour.

Methods: At the 2-week follow-up visit women were randomly assigned to either face-to-face interview in which they responded directly to the interviewer, or secret-voting (those who opted out were interviewed) whereby they recorded their answers on the secret-voting form. Regression analyses were conducted.

Results: Of 327 respondents, women in secret voting (n=103) had a significantly lower mean age ($p<0.01$), higher education ($p<0.01$), higher peri-urban residency ($p=0.05$), lower marriage ($p<0.01$), lower cohabiting with partner ($p=0.07$), and higher reports of ever used a condom ($p=0.03$). These variables were included in all the multiple regression models presented below. The groups did not differ on basis of employment ($p=0.6$), religion ($p=0.34$), or social-economic-status ($p=0.8$).

In secret-voting, 11% of women report multiple current partners compared to 4% in face-to-face interviews (adjusted- $p=0.02$). 22 women (22%) (mean:1.39; SD:1.1,) reported by secret voting more than 1 partner in the last 12 months, compared to 7% (mean:1.08; SD:0.31,) in face-to-face interview (adjusted- $p<0.01$). Overall, women (n=323) reported a mean of 2.65 partners in their life time ranging from 1 to 21. This didn't differ by method of data collection (adjusted- $p=0.37$). Women in face-to-face interviews reported a slightly higher mean number of sex acts in the last 2 weeks (mean:2.43; SD:3.04;) compared to secret-voting (mean:2.1; SD:2.27;). The difference was not significant (adjusted- $p=0.44$). Results for condom use and anal sex will also be presented.

Conclusion: Secret-voting sexual behaviour data collection results in higher reporting of some categories of sexual behaviour, but not others. Data limitations will be discussed. The results suggest that providing informants with the option for secret-voting may improve the quality of sexual behaviour data.