

POL: Popular Opinion Leader



A Community AIDS/HIV Risk-reduction Program for Gay Men

The Research

The Science Behind the Package

Popular Opinion Leader (POL) is an intervention based on a program that identifies, trains, and enlists the help of key opinion leaders to change risky sexual norms and behaviors in the gay community. The program is based on diffusion of innovation/social influence principles, which states that trends and innovations are often initiated by a relatively small segment of opinion leaders in the population. Once innovations are visibly modeled and accepted, they then diffuse throughout a population, influencing others.

Target Population

Men who frequent gay bars

Intervention

A cadre of trusted, well-liked men who frequent gay bars are trained to endorse safer sexual behaviors in casual, one-on-one conversations with peers at the bars and other settings. During these conversations, the “popular opinion leader” corrects misperceptions, discusses the importance of HIV prevention, describes strategies he uses to reduce his own risk (e.g., keeping condoms nearby, avoiding sex when intoxicated, resisting coercion for unsafe sex), and recommends that the peer adopt safer sex behaviors. Popular opinion leaders wear buttons displaying the project logo, which also is on posters around the bars, as a conversation-starting technique. Each leader agrees to have at least 14 such conversations and to recruit another popular opinion leader.

Research Results

The **POL** intervention produced the following results among patrons of bars where the program was conducted:

- Unprotected anal intercourse decreased from between 15 to 29 percent
- Condom use increased
- Numbers of sex partners decreased

For Details on the Research Design

Kelly JA, Murphy DA, Sikkema KJ, McAuliffe RL, Roffman RA, Solomon LJ, Winett RA, Kalichman SC (1997). Randomised, controlled, community-level HIV-prevention intervention for sexual-risk behaviour among homosexual men in US cities. Community HIV Prevention Research Collaborative. *Lancet*, 350(9090), 1500-1505.

The Intervention

A Package Developed from Science

Replicating Effective Programs (REP) is a CDC-initiated project that supports the translation of evidence-based HIV/AIDS prevention interventions into everyday practice, by working with the original researchers in developing a user-friendly package of materials designed for prevention providers. **POL** is one of the REP interventions. The **POL** intervention package is the product of extensive collaboration between HIV prevention researchers who originally developed and evaluated the intervention and AIDS service organizations that implemented the intervention.

Core Elements

Core elements are intervention components that must be maintained without alteration to ensure program effectiveness. The core elements of **POL** include:

1. Identifying and enlisting the support of popular and well-liked opinion leaders to take on risk reduction advocacy roles
2. Training cadres of opinion leaders to disseminate risk-reduction endorsement messages within their own social networks
3. Supporting and reinforcing successive waves of opinion leaders to help reshape social norms to encourage safer sex

Package Contents

- Intervention manual that guides organizations through planning, implementation, maintenance, and program evaluation
- Video that provides instruction in **POL** intervention techniques
- Copies and samples of training materials

Timeline for Availability

The package is available from CDC along with training on program implementation and technical assistance.

For More Information on the **POL** Package

To find out more about future trainings, please visit <http://effectiveinterventions.org>.