

Who's cheating?

Agreements about sexual exclusivity and subsequent concurrent partnering in Australian couples: The Australian Longitudinal Study of Health and Relationships

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Background

Concurrency is a driver of generalised STI epidemics.

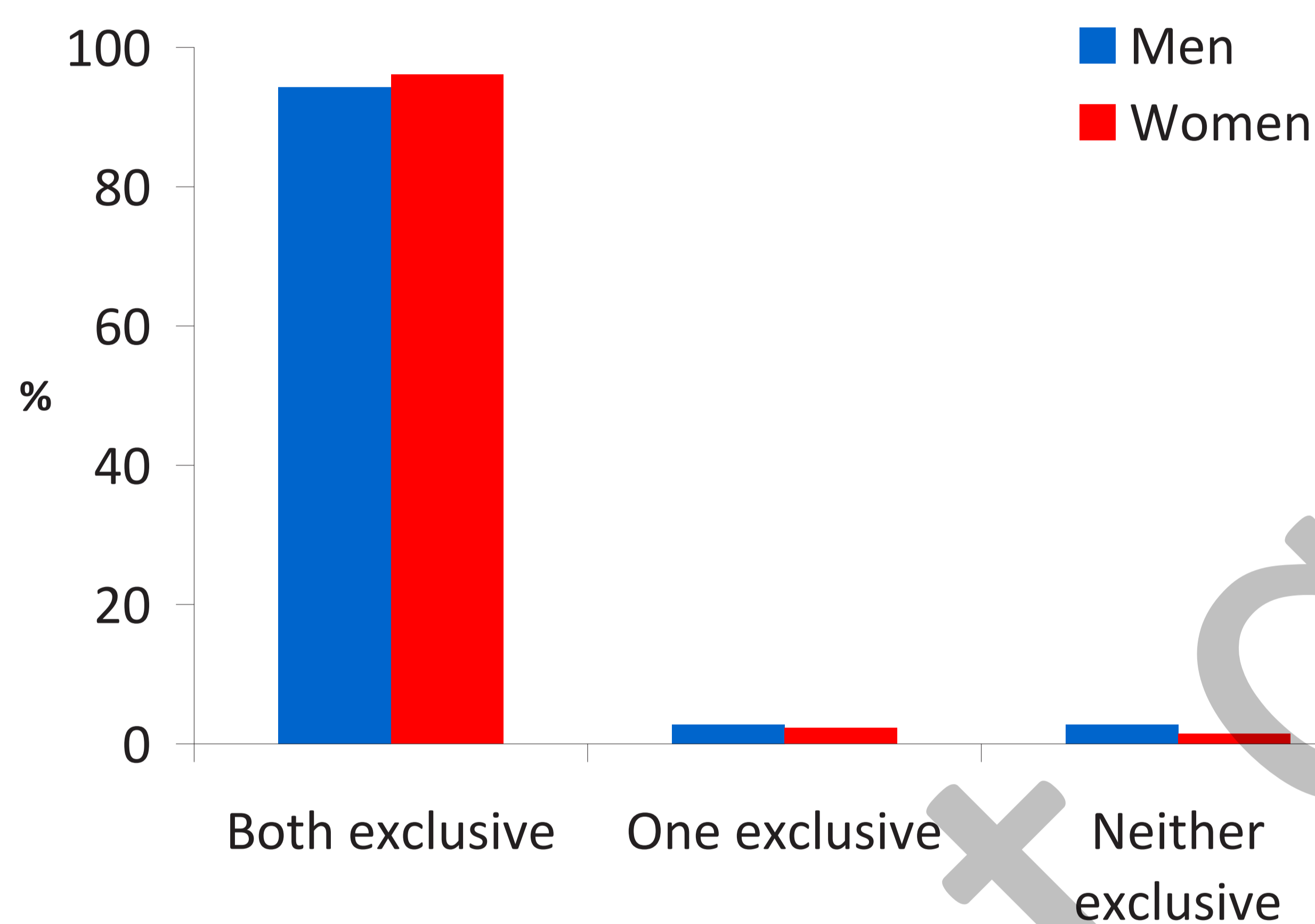
1. Do Australian heterosexuals in regular relationships often have concurrent partners?
2. What agreements do they have about sex outside the couple?
3. What effects do agreements have on:
 - survival of the relationship?
 - sex outside the relationship?

Method

- Representative household sample
- 8656 Australians aged 16–64
- Selected by random digit dialling
- Computer-assisted telephone interview
- Wave 1: recruited 6597 people in regular relationships
- Wave 2: 78% interviewed a year later

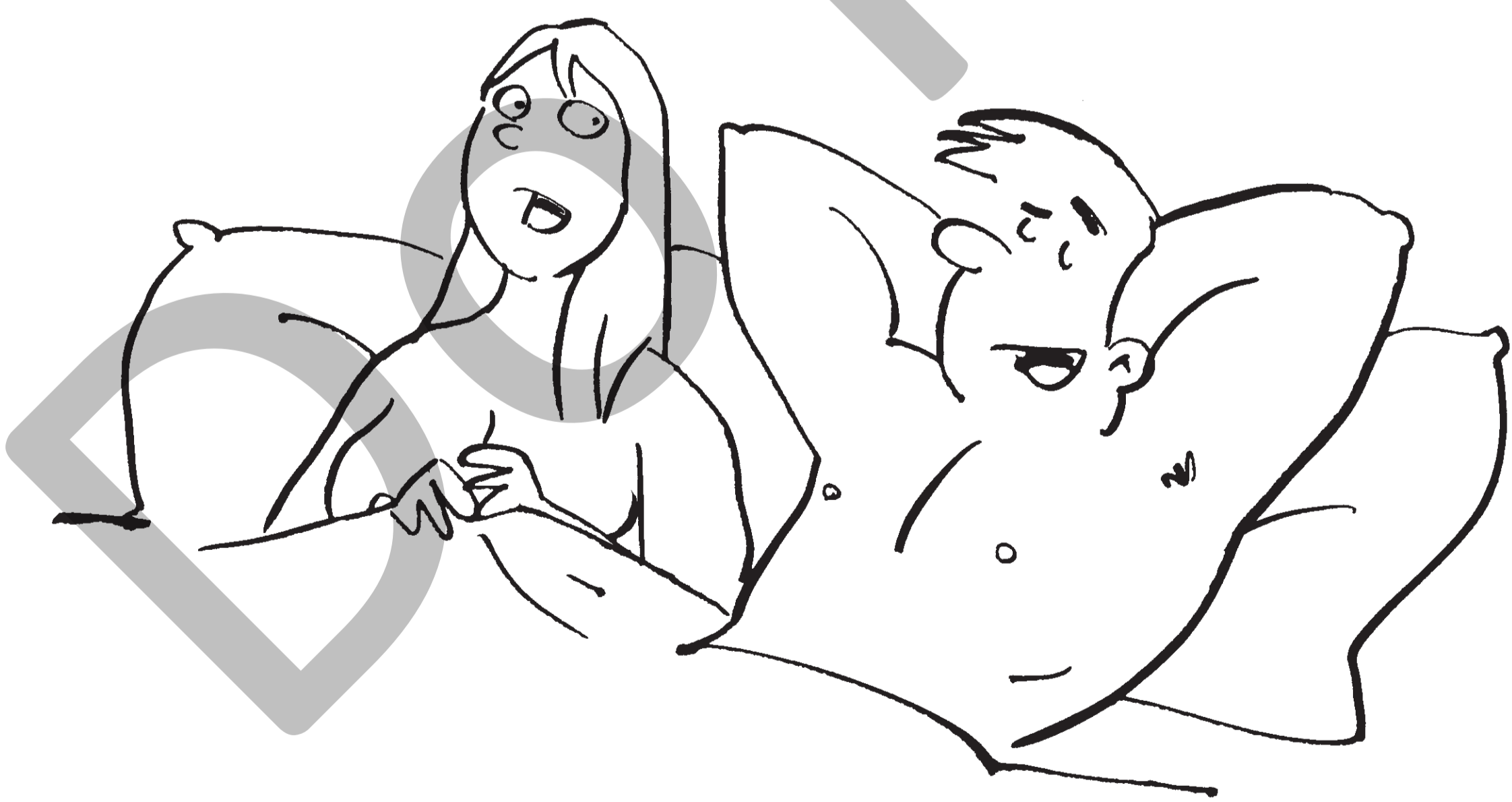
Expectations

We asked 'Do you expect to have sex only with her?' and ... 'Do you expect that she would have sex only with you?'



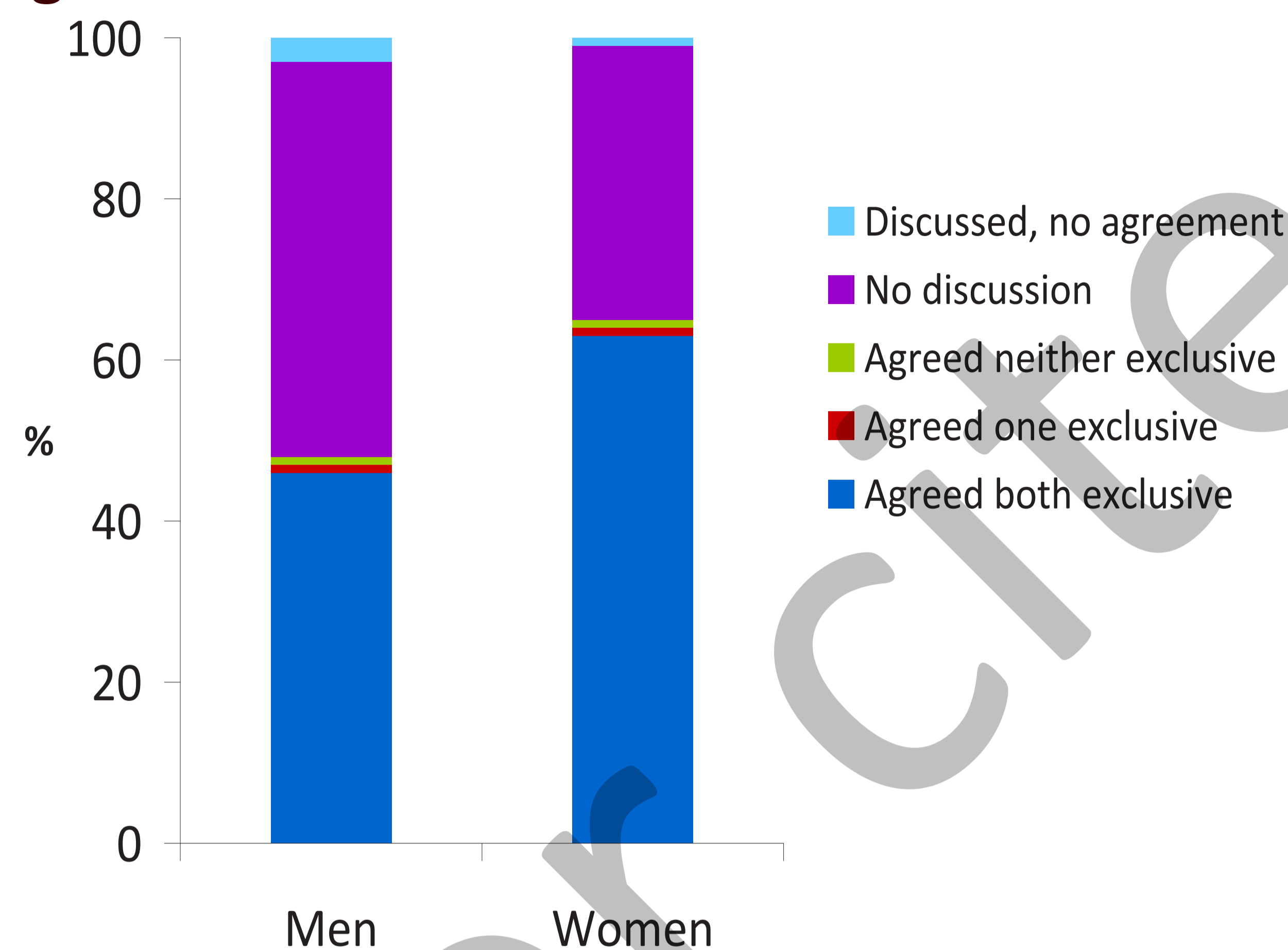
Agreements

51% of men and 66% of women said they had discussed their expectations. Almost all who had discussed it had come to a clear agreement (95% men, 98% women).



I don't think we should sleep with anyone else ...
Sleep? No problem

Agreements



A year later ...

11% of couples had broken up; they were more likely to be aged <30, in shorter relationships (<3 years), not married, not living together.

Couples with no agreement appeared to be more likely to be still together.

Agreement category	Proportion who broke up	
	Men %	Women %
Agreed both exclusive	10	12
Agreed one exclusive	33	29
Agreed neither exclusive	46	53
No discussion	6	7
Discussed, no agreement	12	20

Do people comply with their agreements?

Few people—mostly men—who had agreed to be exclusive broke that agreement.

Sex with outside partners was much more common among the small number of couples with a non-exclusive agreement.

Agreement category	Proportion who had sex with someone else	
	Men %	Women %
Agreed both exclusive	4	1
Agreed one exclusive	50	30
Agreed neither exclusive	53	44
No discussion	4	2
Discussed, no agreement	5	5

Conclusions

In Australia sexual exclusivity, even in new relationships, is often assumed and not discussed. Health promotion advice to engage openly with this topic to assess or avoid STI risk may be fruitless. STIs among heterosexuals are driven largely by sequential partnering (regular or casual). STI prevention should encourage testing after break-ups or casual sex and recommend that new couples do not stop using condoms before testing.

ALSHR is based at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne. For further information on this poster contact Dr Juliet Richters, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney. Email: j.richters@unsw.edu.au

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