

RUNNING HEAD: Self-Reports of STDs

What are the Consequences of Relying upon Self-Reports of Sexually Transmitted Diseases?  
Lessons Learned about Recanting in a Longitudinal Study

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## ABSTRACT

Self-reports are the standard measure of STD history employed in survey research. To what extent are self-reports of ever having an STD recanted in a followup data collection? Using the National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM), we assess consistency over time in self-reports of ever having an STD in a sample of young men transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood (age 15-26), a population in which STDs are particularly prevalent. Approximately 7% of all sexually experienced young men rescinded STD self-reports over time. Thus, self-reports at one point in time likely underestimate true STD history, using earlier self-reports as the criterion. Among men who ever report an STD, 94-98% recant their reports in later waves. Knowledge of the extent of underreporting can potentially be used to adjust cross-sectional estimates of STDs based on survey self-reports. This study moves us one step closer to estimating just how much underreporting of STDs in self-reports is.