

# Factors shaping STI risk perceptions and practices following midlife relationship breakdown: A socioecological perspective



MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit



## KEY MESSAGE: Navigating sexual safety with new partners in midlife is constrained by multi-level factors.

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### INTRODUCTION

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are increasing among those over 40, but little is known about the social context of STI transmission among people experiencing relationship transition during midlife.
- We sought to identify factors shaping STI risk perceptions and practices among midlife individuals following the end of a long-term relationship.

### METHODS

- Design:** In-depth interviews with respondents to the third British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes & Lifestyles (Natsal-3).
- Participants:** 10 women and 9 men aged 40-59 who reported the end of a marital/cohabiting relationship with an other-sex partner in the past 5 years.
- Analysis:** Thematic analysis (TA), with themes then organised using a modified socioecological framework.

### ANALYSIS

- Participants' accounts indicate barriers to, and resources for, STI prevention after midlife relationship transition which accumulate across layers of social context – at the individual level, with sexual partners, peers, communities, and within broader social structures (see Fig 1).

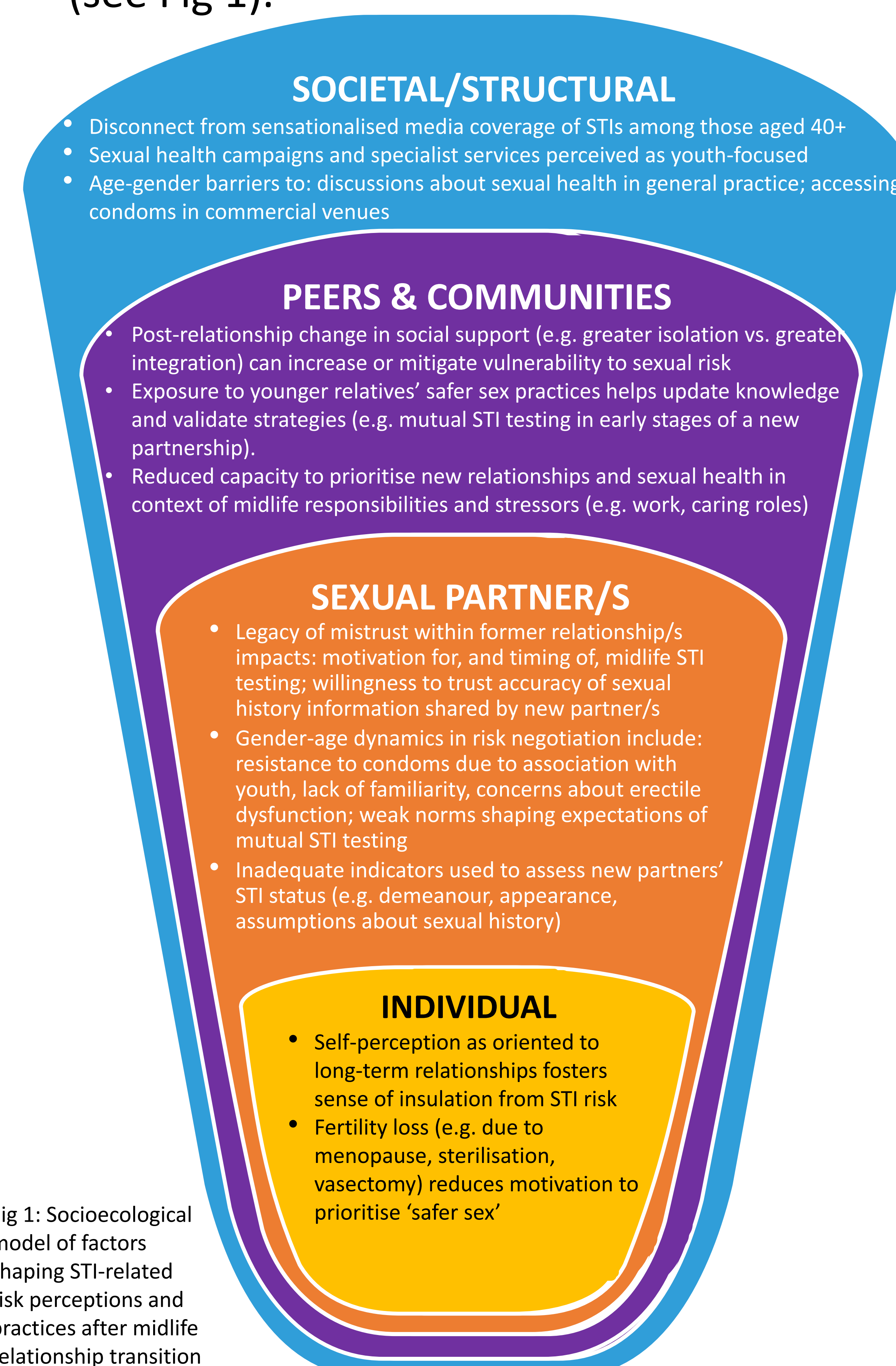


Fig 1: Socioecological model of factors shaping STI-related risk perceptions and practices after midlife relationship transition

### IMPLICATIONS

- Findings suggest unmet need for sexual health promotion among midlife adults with new sexual partners.
- Preventing STIs among midlife adults may require age-sensitive campaigns and interventions designed to address multi-level constraints on the navigation of sexual safety with new sexual partners.
- Harnessing existing flows of sexual health information and health-promoting influence within social relationships (e.g. with friends and younger relatives) may be promising avenues for intervention.