

Improving the Capacity of the HIV Sector to Respond to the Ethno-Racial MSM: Tapping Front-Line Expertise and Wisdom

Research Study Highlights &
Recommendations

June 2009

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5-Asian Community AIDS Services; 6-Ryerson University; 7-York University;

8-AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health & Long Term Care;

9-Ontario HIV Treatment Network; 10-Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

11- AIDS Committee Toronto

Project Objectives

- To identify issues of concerns and relevance affecting ethno–racial MSM in relation to HIV prevention
- Explore frontline experiences and perspectives on knowledge base related to HIV prevention amongst the target populations
- Recommended programs and interventions

Methods

- Individual interviews with 10 prevention workers and 7 focus group with MSM from the target communities (African, Caribbean, Chinese, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Portuguese, and Spanish including ethno-racial MSM PHAs)

N = 71

Results were analyzed thematically using N-Vivo 7.0

Results

- Personal Issues contributing to risky behaviors
- Societal Issues contributing to risky behaviors
- Ideas for programs and future research

Personal Risk Factors (1)

- Social isolation and Alienation:
 - Multiple challenges facing Newcomer ethno-racial MSMs
 - Geographic isolation
 - Lack of services outside urban centres
 - Lack of information about social spaces and services
 - Language barriers

Personal Risk Factors (2)

- Racism and internalized racism:
 - Lack of inclusiveness in dominant gay community
 - Ethno-racial MSM experiences not reflected in dominant white gay culture
 - Dominant concept of beauty devalues ethnoracial MSM and impact on self-esteem
 - Lowered self-esteem, heightened sense of alienation and need to feel belong increase risk taking

Personal Risk Factors (3)

- Culture related factors:
 - Ethno-racial sexual identity different from western gay identity, non-gay identified MSM have less access to HIV prevention information
 - Coming out poses risk of alienation from family & alienating family from ethnic communities
 - Cultural, religious and identity issues may affect men's ability to communicate and practice safer sex
 - Education messages and materials often do not recognize cultural differences

Personal Risk Factors (4)

- Difficulties for PHAs to disclose and engage in safer sex:
 - PHAs perceived as vector of disease
 - Disclosure of HIV status often led to social and sexual rejection
 - Stigma affects PHA's self esteem and makes disclosure more difficult
 - Fear of disclosure increases isolation and limits access to support
 - Inability to disclose leads to riskier decisions

Systemic Risk Factors (1)

- Invisibility of Negative Impact of HIV:
 - Long term survivors present positive role model and often people forget devastating impact of HIV
 - Younger generation has no PHA peers and lack experience with personal impact
 - Some perceive being HIV+ as possibly beneficial in gaining access to services and support

Systemic Risk Factors (2)

- Religious and Cultural Homophobia and Sex-phobia
 - Homosexuality often condemned by religion, installing guilt and shame in ethnic MSM
 - Talking about sex is taboo in many cultures, making sexual communication very difficult for ethno-MSM
 - Lack of sex education
 - Homophobia in churches and ethnic community centres

Systemic Risk Factors (3)

- Myths, Misconceptions, Assumptions and Stigma:
 - Language barriers to information and lack of culturally sensitive information
 - Inaccurate information on HIV transmission, disease progression, condom use, access to services
 - Mistaken presumption of partners' HIV status based on partners' condom use
 - Fear of discrimination and criminalization prohibit disclosure

Systemic Risk Factors (4)

- Lack of appropriate community support:
 - Little coming out support for ethno MSM
 - Lack of support to meet different social needs of newcomer MSMs
 - Homophobia in ethnic community services
 - Lack of culturally appropriate support in mainstream gay services
 - Lack of ethno-specific safe space for MSM

Systemic Risk Factors (5)

- Other external risk factors:
 - Sex environment with high level of drug and alcohol use
 - Pressure and need to feel belong to mainstream gay culture
 - Lack of immigration status prohibit access to information and services

Program improvement & Future research

- Targeted efforts to address holistic needs of MSM newcomers
 - Develop safer sex programs and materials that address cultural reality of ethno-racial MSM in different languages accessible to newcomers
 - Community support that address social, settlement and sexual needs of newcomer PHAs

Program improvement & Future research

- Diversify prevention services to address the complex realities of ethno-racial MSMs:
 - Programs that target non-gay identified MSM (DL)
 - Programs that address all sexualities
 - Programs that target beyond the bar/bath scenes
 - Address older MSM's needs (aging, marriage etc.)
 - Address Newcomer needs
 - Explore more effective use of different medium e.g. internet, ethnic media

Program improvement & Future research

- Language specific and culturally sensitive materials and training to enhance prevention capacity:
 - Information for newcomers on gay culture
 - Education targeting parents and church leaders
 - Coming out support and information
 - Community support focusing on building self esteem and effective sexual communication
 - Disclosure training and support for PHAs

Program improvement & Future research

- Address Information Gaps in both scientific and human aspects of HIV to at risk MSMs:
 - Information on transmission, re-infection, disease progression, treatment side effects etc.
 - Information on the physical, emotional and social challenges faced by PHAs
 - Information to promote understanding and compassion for PHAs
 - Information accessible in different languages and medium (e.g. internet)

Potential Research Questions

- Community specific needs, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, coping skills and impact of social determinants
- Experience of ethno-MSMs at various mainstream gay venues
- Evaluate effectiveness of existing prevention education programs
- Vulnerability and protective factors of newcomer MSMs
- Information on married MSM on the down low
- Needs of older MSM from ethno-racial communities
- Differential impact of disclosure & criminalization of HIV on racialized MSM communities
- Cultural specific emotional coping skills
- Interventions focused on faith based organizations and families
- Cultural specific risk & behaviors associated with substance use

Acknowledgment & thanks

- Ontario HIV Treatment Network, Dr. Robb Travers, Jason Globerman, Andre Ceranto.
- AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
- Members of Ethno-racial MSM Research Working Group
- ACAS, ASAAP, BLACK CAP, AC Windsor, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, Pink Triangle Services Ottawa, Portuguese MSM
- MSM focus groups participants: African, Caribbean, Chinese, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Portuguese and Spanish Speaking