A Social Ecological Examination of HIV Transmission Risk among MSM in a Chinese Trading City

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Abstract

Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, China is a trading center of 3.2 million people, of whom 86% are migrants. The city also hosts large numbers of tourists and business travelers, and is a hub for migrant and transient men who have sex with men (MSM). Recent surveillance data show a rapid escalation of new HIV infections and a 10.7% prevalence rate among MSM. Among MSM, the epidemic is embedded in a context of prevalent commercial sex trading, extensive sexual interactions across diverse local, migrant and transient populations, and severe levels of sexual identity and HIV stigmas. Given the public health significance of this rapid increase in infections, research is needed to understand how intrapersonal (substance use, stigma, resilience, HIV knowledge), interpersonal (peers, sex partners, life transitions), institutional (HIV prevention and care resources, migrant support services), and community (drug use practices, sex work norms, condom access) factors impact patterns of HIV prevention behaviors and HIV treatment uptake among MSM in Yiwu. A collaborative pilot project to address this gap is planned for early 2015, with the aim of enrolling 400 HIV-negative and 200 HIV-positive MSM and transgender women in an in-depth survey study. The goal is to understand the social ecology of HIV transmission among MSM in Yiwu and to identify culturally-relevant targets for intervention. The project was initiated through cross-national relationships that developed through the Fogarty International Research and Training Program. Fieldwork will be conducted by staff and volunteers of the HomoCaring Group. A grassroots, innovative non-governmental organization, HomoCaring conducts community outreach, hosts online social networking groups, supports case management for HIV-positive MSM, and maintains a confidential registry of HIV-negative men for testing reminders. In the past year, HomoCaring has worked closely with the Zhejiang Association of AIDS and STD Prevention and Control to engage over 1500 MSM in HIV prevention activities and to provide support services to over 150 HIV-positive MSM. The pilot research project is expected to have considerable significance in advancing our understanding of HIV transmission among MSM in urban areas with large numbers of migrant and transient people.

Objective:

1. To understand the social ecology of HIV transmission among MSM in Yiwu and to identify culturally-relevant targets for intervention.
2. To examine the influence of intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and community factors on patterns of HIV transmission, sexual risk behaviors, and HIV treatment access and uptake.
3. The study will be conducted in 2 phases:
   1. Qualitative - 4 focus groups of about 6 to 10 participants
   2. Survey Research: 150 HIV positive MSM; 150 HIV negative/unknown MSM

Survey Research Measures:

A. Demographics
B. HIV Knowledge
C. Condom Social Norms
D. Attitudes and Perceptions About Safer Sex
E. Stigma & Discrimination
F. Partner Violence
G. Drug Use
H. Loneliness
I. Resilience
J. Sexual Behavior With Women
K. Sexual Behavior With Men
L. Primary Male Partner
M. General Health
N. Depression
O. Access to Care

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