

Social and Structural Risks for HIV among Migrant and Immigrant Men Who have Sex with Men in Moscow, Russia: Implications for Prevention

Short title: Social & structural risks for HIV among immigrant/migrant MSM, Russia

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ONLINE SUPPLEMENT

Appendix of Qualitative Findings and Supporting Quotes:

The following quotations are included to provide supporting evidence for qualitative findings. Due to length, they have been retained from the original manuscript. Each section below corresponds to the socio-ecologic model and the levels described in the Findings and with associated text to provide context.

Public policy and structural:

For some men, poor living conditions, the need for food and accommodations, and lack of resources and support upon entry to Moscow led to sex work for financial gain and/or lodging. Sometimes sex work was conducted for pleasure, but this was not always the case.

Q1 *KI1011, Age 35 yrs. First of all, we don't need sexual relations. We just came to Moscow, and we are in such situation that we don't have where to settle for living, even if to consider this. Nobody is waiting for us here, first of all. And secondly, it's about lodging. To go living in the street is not the way out. Or... to get employed, you need so many documents and they also cost money, 15 thousands, for example, per person. Aiming to make documents, we looked on this board and decided... It was my friend who gave us a piece of advice. Let's try. We put an advert [for sex work].*

Q2 *KI1019, Age 27 yrs. I don't know, I liked it when it first happened. Then I started and further on and further on. Moreover, at present, I have no job. That's why I have to.*

A wide array of migration motivations were reported, ranging from persecution and blackmail in the home country (Q3-4) to general desire for freedom of sexuality and opportunity.

Q3 *KI1021, Age 29 yrs. [In the home country] I felt that something was wrong, because we just relaxed and another car appeared, two more people came. Well, we stand there, that fellow near me says: these are our acquaintances, look, guys, these are fags, we know them, and ask me, is it true you [have sex with men]? ... At that time six men attacked me and [my friend], all together there were six of them... As I was in minority I couldn't cope. And here I notice a video-camera. They record all this. Well, they beat me seriously... After this episode at home they asked me, to tell them who, where and how and we will clear out... Then my younger cousin comes home and asks: 'do you know Alik __?' I ask: 'who is he?' [My cousin knew] and he told me as it happened. He managed to say it. I was told at home: 'if you want to be alive, take your rags and blow away from here'. All my family learnt about that. And my cousin comes in and says: people made a deal that besides our house nobody would know it and this information won't be spread. I have two sisters, who are married, one younger brother, who is married. As soon as everybody gets to know about that – these sisters will return home, because their husbands will divorce with them immediately. I don't want to break anybody's life... This is how I came here and live here now.*

Q4 *KI1012, Age 24 yrs. People are more experienced here [in Moscow]. They will not say: "You are a pervert". But in general, let say, I have a guy. We live together... In Moscow everything is more open. And we walk together in the street. And there [at home country] it's impossible. In our environment it's very strict. And here it's open. It's up to you, live as you want. That's why it's easier here, than there. Why Moscow? There's work here, it's possible to earn normal money and to work.*

Other experiences of stigma and social violence, however, were largely related to xenophobia, rather than homophobia. This did not appear to manifest as physical violence in Moscow, according to participants, though immigrant/migrants were vulnerable to police and other institutional harassment and exploitation.

Q5 *KI1011, Age 35 yrs. The militia [police] 'loves' us much here. Because they stop us. There was a situation. I had all documents with me, as it should be. I know how to make registration for three months in Moscow, to go normally...[An officer] put me into the car, He says: "Then we take you now to immigration... and they will immediately deport you there"... He didn't take me anywhere. He was driving me for half an hour. He says: "Give something". I gave him five hundred rubles not to drive with him for the whole day, because he put me in the car and that's it.*

Stigma and human rights concerns in the home country were also associated with diagnosis of HIV infection. For many, this led to an avoidance of HIV testing, as positive status was believed to result in physical and social isolation.

Q6 *KI1011, Age 35 yrs. In [home country] it's very much prosecuted. For example, if a person gets infected with HIV there and if it is discovered that the diagnosis was confirmed, i.e. positive diagnosis was confirmed, he will not be released. He will be closed like in the prison, in a special hospital - and that's all... But they somehow isolate him.*

Community:

While participants reported greater sexual freedom in Moscow, many felt there was significant need to avoid others of their same ethnicity, even in Moscow, for fear of unintentional disclosure and family rejection. Focus group participants reported that men of certain ethnic groups often gather together to socialize, but 'gays do not'. Some men maintained a heterosexual identity when socializing or simply avoided discussion of sexual practices.

Q7 *KI 1012, Age 24 yrs. [When asked about meeting other MSM from the same country of origin] I try not to get acquainted. [Interviewer: What are you afraid of?] If he goes and gets acquainted with my friends, he will go and tell not only to friends, but then tell somebody else and to somebody else. And they will point there [in home country]. And here [Moscow], it is quite a different thing.*

For one participant who was Tajik but grew up in Uzbekistan, reported avoiding both ethnic groups, particularly in the context of his involvement in sex work.

Q8 *KI1011, Age 35 yrs. [Interviewer: Can there be in Moscow such venues where Tajik men come on a regular basis to meet?] In Moscow - no. On purpose that Tajiks-gays gather - no. All of them will try to avoid each other... If now a Tajik calls and says, let's make this, I wouldn't go, despite of the fact I will be paid. Because there's a kind of internal restriction, something restrict...I wouldn't communicate, no way. An Uzbek calls, "let's talk, let's meet". [I say] "Well, sorry, I have no time."*

Q9 *KI1019, Age 27 yrs. I have only three friends. But f***ing many acquaintances. I don't count acquaintances. We have good human relations for already 7-8 years, three men – two Russians and one Dagestani. By now we have normal human relations. We don't interfere into business of each other. They don't know what I do, I don't know what they do, you know. May be they are also on the subject [having sex with men]. They never told me.*

Several ethnic MSM exhibited internalized homophobia that seemed to be related to shame and fear of disclosure to family, friends, and broader society. Often, this manifested in overt disdain for other gay men. Some considered insertive sex with men to be acceptable for financial purposes, or while in prison, but it was not acceptable to be homosexual. Such belief was linked to norms in the home country. Such belief was linked norms in the home country.

Q10 *KI 1016, Age 25 yrs. Natives from the Northern Caucasus, the overwhelming majority, make sex with men for payment. As they get into sexual relations with men for payment exclusively in active [insertive] role, they are not considered homosexuals. Also sex with men in active role is not considered offensive in prison environment and after being released from the prison.*

While participants did acknowledge that there was greater sexual freedom in Moscow, it cannot be assumed that internalized homophobia did not exist among Moscovite MSM, as one Moscovite MSM explained:

Q11 *KI 1014, Age 29 yrs. (Moscovite MSM) The hidden homophobia arises when a person can't accept himself and he starts to have problems on the level of relationship of a couple, relations with his mother, father, when a person tries to be the one, whom his parents want to see. They don't confess to themselves. When a person secretly dates under an assumed name, uses somebody's photo. He dates, then meets, has a one-time sex and that's all. I.e. double standards, double life. But as a rule these are married people, who don't have a possibility: if a wife would get to know, she would leave, make a scandal. All their life they live like that. I think they are unhappy people. They live somebody's life. They live this way because mum said like that. They live this way that because all live this way...*

Mixed perceptions of social capital prevailed, though most MSM (ethnic minority and Moscovite alike) seemed to concur there was not a true gay community that existed in

Moscow, though it was acknowledged that homosexual men do have gay acquaintances (KI1007, Age 27 yrs.) and several gay organizations and websites do exist in Moscow.

Q12 *KI1021, Age 29 yrs. It seemed to me that there's a community here, where people are united, where people will stand for each other, help each other, at least with pieces of advice. And it appears they are ready to strangle each other, but anyway they can't live without each other. It's such an interesting phenomenon.*

Network:

Network-level factors were predominantly associated with sexual partnerships and relationships with sex work clientele. Sexual relationships were hidden, often short-term and in risky settings. Some considered short-term relationships with high numbers of partners was simply a matter of preference.

Q13 *KI1011, Age 35 yrs. And there are a lot of 'one-time men'. He dates and even if everything is perfect, everything is as he wished. Anyway it will happen only once. You can't understand if it's a one-time person or he can invite you again. Because every time he needs a new feeling.*

With respect to sex work, there is a high demand for ethnic populations due to novelty and perceived willingness to participate in certain sexual practices. Others suggested that demand for foreign MSW was attributable to clients' perceptions of their low social connectedness that would prevent them from blackmailing clients.

Q14 *KI1011, Age 35 yrs. Compared to other adverts, here the demand is higher [for ethnic men]. Well, what is meant under demand - there are more those who want to date compared to if I write an advert that I'm Russian, Moscovite. ...I never come to a stranger and ask him about where he works. I don't care about it. Because he pays me exactly for one thing, but not for questions. Maybe we have more demands due to that, I just thought. As I'm a visitor [immigrant], I know nobody, I will never be able to find him and blackmail. Maybe the demand is higher due to this.*

For those involved in sex work, the physical, sexual and social risks were highly variable and influenced by the mode or venue for advertising and selling sex, as well as the clientele who frequented these venues. Venues ranged from the traditional *pleshkas*, public areas such as parks that are known for sex work, to more technology-based sources.

Q15 *KI1021, Age 29 yrs. Pleshka was cultured, decent, everybody was concerned with criminal prosecution from the side of militia, people behaved modest... Now unfortunately, pleshkas ceased blossoming already. A lot of criminal elements go here! ... If not for Internet and mobile phone, people would still stand at pleshka... Pleshka's people knew that "our" people gather there, that one can date with somebody. At present I don't know why, but pick up still happens at pleshkas, without mediators, tet-a-tet. The whole Moscow knows what happens there.*

Individual:

Condom use was reported often, but in more in-depth discussions, it seemed to be a decision based on perceptions of partner or client. This included details such as whether the individual appeared to have an infection or the venue where they met.

Q16 *KI1019, Age 27 yrs. In Kitai-gorod [pleshka] there are only sluts. If it's a normal gay – he is clean, but from Kitai-gorod it's even dangerous to [have sex with] anybody. And if it's a normal gay, a clean one, he is on Internet...There are some people, who have condoms with them. Maybe they are sick... I always (have sex) with condoms, all the time... There are some gays, almost 60%, they can't get any kef with a condom. They want without a condom. I can't, me personally. I can't do this way.*

Reports of HIV testing frequency were mixed. Some, particularly those involved in sex work, reported regular HIV testing.

Q17 *KI1019, Age 27 yrs. I get tested monthly. Every month. This month I'm planning to. Why, it's 4800 for everything. All tests for 4800. I get tested monthly. Now I have one doctor there, a gay. It's for the second time that I don't pay anything. It will be the third time as I pay nothing. I will not pay. I f*** him one time, give him two thousands and get tested for free.*

Others avoided testing due to the shame associated with having engaged in HIV risk behaviors or cost, or fear of isolation or expulsion. For entry or to avoid expulsion, some immigrant/migrant men are known to obtain false documents and results for their registration.

Q18 *KI1011, Age 35 yrs. Recently, three months ago I underwent the complete examination, it was the first time in my life. I got tested completely [including HIV]... I came and had been in process of registration for three months I have to pass medical examination make blood analysis, for AIDS, to get tested for everything and when everything appears to be ideal, only then the documents are processed. And here, left, right and the centre, [false] immigration documents are produced everywhere, they also produce a medical card for you themselves. Nobody ever gets tested. I never saw that somebody got tested, never heard of that.*