

Social Pathways of Sexual Risk and Protection among West Indian Immigrant STD Clinic Attendees

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Presented at the 135th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association Washington, DC, November 5, 2007, Session 3149, Presentation # 160550

This research was supported by a center grant from NIAID to the Columbia-Rockefeller Center for AIDS Research (P30 AI42848: Scott Hammer, PI), by a center grant from NIMH to the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at NY State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University (P30-MH43520: Anke Ehrhardt, PI), and by a training grant from NIMH (T32 MH19139; Behavioral Sciences Research in HIV Infection; Anke Ehrhardt, PI).

Overview of Presentation

- **How migration experiences may shape risk and protection for English-speaking West Indian immigrants to NYC**
- **Description of the study**
- **Findings as they relate to three areas that emerged in the study**



Why Focus on English-Speaking NYC West Indian Immigrants?

- **WI immigrants are >20% of NYC foreign-born population**
- **Between 25-30% of its 2.2 million black population**
- **23% of black New Yorkers newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS are foreign-born**
- **50% of these originate from the Caribbean/WI**
- **We know little about sexual health and HIV/STI risk in WI immigrants and how migration influences it**
- **WI migration includes for economic reasons and migration of sexual minorities - Focus here is on economic migrants**

Contexts of Risk & Protection: WI Countries of Origin

- HIV prevalence in the Caribbean region is highest in the Americas – approximately 2%
- Gender inequalities in WI societies are prominent
- Violence against women is socially tolerated
- Open discussion of sexual matters between adults and children and men and women is socially taboo
- Homosexuality is highly stigmatized

Contexts of Risk & Protection: Migration & Longer-Term Experiences in Host Country

- Gender: Shifts in women's economic opportunities may increase relationship power and sexual protection
- Sexual Networks: WI migration is transnational and circular – could increase sexual mixing
- Changes in access to prevention tools – testing and treatment, prevention messages, condoms
- Discrimination: As black immigrants, WIs may experience racial discrimination → marginalization rather than ↑ mobility

Study Participants

- **Recruited from STD clinic of a public hospital located in the heart of the West Indian community in NYC**
- **36 Women and 20 men**
- **Aged 18-40 years**
- **Born in the English-speaking Caribbean (West Indies)**
- **Self-identified as Black or African-American**
- **Diagnosed with one of several common STDs (including gonorrhea, Chlamydia, and Trichomoniasis) within the past year**

Assessments

- **Structured Quantitative Measures**
 - **Sexual risk behavior**
 - **Partnerships and partnership characteristics**
 - **Relationship violence**
 - **Drug and alcohol use**
 - **Acculturation scale**
 - **Travel patterns**

Assessments

- **Qualitative Interview Topics**
 - Context and impact of their recent sexually transmitted disease
 - Migration experiences
 - Sexual messages during formative years
 - **Gendered sexual relationship norms in country of origin & US**
 - **Perceptions of HIV risk in US and country of origin**
 - **Migration-related changes in sexual behavior and gender-related beliefs**
- **Two types of comparisons**
 - Country of origin and US
 - Personal migration experiences and effects

Three Areas of Focus

PERCEIVED CHANGES IN

- **Gender power in relationships**
- **Wider sexual networks**
- **Access and exposure to information & prevention messages**

Gender Power

- **Changes in relationship power**
- **Changes in protection from relationship violence**

Increase in Relationship Power

Yeah, because I grew up seein' my father have a lotta power... And since I came to this country I noticed that women is allowed to have power. Or, it's okay for you to yell back, or say no. Or, I wanna do this this week, next week you do what you have to do.

23 year old women who came from Jamaica at age 9

Some Change in Relationship Power

There is some change, 'Cause I'm not staying home. I'm gonna go to school and do whatever I wanna do, I'm sayin' either you support me or you don't, but I'm not gonna stay home and watch kids all day

22 year old woman from Trinidad/Tobago who migrated at age 14

No Change in Relationship Power

No change, I always give that man the power... because I just believe that my man is really the head....

22 year old woman from Jamaica who migrated at age 14

Protection From Relationship Violence: “At Home the Cops Don’t Come”

There isn't much violence in the area because of the way of the police. The way the thing is set up, ain't nobody wanna go to jail.... You know you touch your wife you're goin' to jail....Back home the cops'll come... after the ass-beatin'. They take the man outside, “Why you do that?” And, you know, he say, “Oh you're talking.” And the cops and the guy go up the street and drink a rum and that was it, you know?

37 year old man from Jamaica who migrated at age 25

Protection From Relationship Violence: “But the Cops Still Came”

I know the NYPD has become a friend towards women's violence. And I had a friend, actually, that used to hit his wife. And she pick up the phone and then call 911 and he drop to his knees and start beggin'... And he never did it again. But the cops still came, even though she hung up the phone.

28 year old man from Guyana who migrated at age 23

Sexual Networks

- **Circular migration and travel**
- **Perception of wider networks and less knowledge about partners in NYC**

Sexual Networks: Circular Migration & Travel

TRAVEL TO WEST INDIES IN PAST YEAR

- Of the 36 women, 11% (n = 4) traveled
- Of the 20 men, 15% (n = 3) traveled
- 2 of the 7 travelers had sex with someone from that country during their stay and in both cases it was unprotected

Perception of Sexual Networks: NYC Is Big and Anonymous

America is very big... there's a lotta people in this state... and to go out and to have sex with just anybody that you don't know ... you puttin' yourself at risk... and that' like playing Russian Roulette

There's a lot of opportunity here and .. People .. Just go. They try new things with people...

21 year old man from Jamaica who migrated at age 6

Sex is More Available in NYC

Up here you be runnin' around having sex with anybody. Anybody you see, anybody you want. Down there you gotta pick and choose

19 year old man from Jamaica who migrated at age 7

Easier to Hide Multiple Partners & Fewer Reputational Risks For Women

If a woman has more than one partner... it's easier to hide how many people you've been with sexually ... here. Because you could have somebody ... out-of-state come back here, act like, 'I'm still a virgin' Cause when I came here a lotta people thought I was a virgin. I lived on it for awhile.

21 year old woman from St. Lucia who migrated at age 15

You “Know” Your Partners at Home

If a pin drop it will be heard in the next village...so AIDS and everything... and who have AIDS, and this person suspect if they have it, that's the type of thing that circulates. So you can't help but to try to protect yourself.

You come from a small speck in the Caribbean ... to this large, vast country. Everyone is busy running up and down ...and you don't know who is who.

28 year old man from Guyana who migrated at age 23

Close-knit Communities at Home Foster Protection

If I was back home, to be honest with you, ...I would've been in church. I would've been good, you know? Because, ... I have people there who would direct me ... Takin' care of me, makin' sure I go to the right places ... Up here, I don't have that, okay?

19 year old women from St. Lucia who migrated at age 16

Access & Exposure to Information and Prevention Messages

- **More discussion of STIs and HIV in NYC**
- **Easier to get STI treatment**
- **More discussion of sex**
- **Greater availability and awareness of condoms**

Information is More Available in NYC

...there would be a greater risk if I was home than if I was here. Because at home, there are no places to go where you can find out information ... but here you have more places than if you were home ... it's more funded by the government here and here it's like an open broadcast.

20 year old woman from Trinidad and Tobago who migrated at age 1

Easier to Ask Someone to Get Tested in NYC

Up here it's easy to get somebody to go get tested for AIDS. Up here it's way bigger than Grenada... So a guy might know a girl from somewhere. And when he start messin with her she might tell him 'go get tested'.....

Sometimes the man might tell a woman she should go, 'cause...it's a big place and, you know, a lotta stuff be happenin' so...everybody tryin' to be on the safe side.

23 year old man who migrated from Grenada at age 19

Greater Awareness of HIV/STIs in NYC

Here I think they are managing to control it to a point... because... it's more in your face ... so you have to become aware whether you want to or not..

22 year old women from Trinidad/Tobago who migrated at age 20

Sex Discussed More Openly in NYC

It's totally different ... because in the US, you talk to a person, every third sentence the word sex comes in, or gay comes in, or lesbian comes in.. So you can ... get a lot of information about sex here, cause sex is openly discussed. Its in books, it's in magazines. On the TV and radio ..

40 year old women from Jamaica who migrated at age 27

Challenges in Interpretation

- Study is at one time point - only after migration
- Some came at a young age and have not been back but may have heard “reports”
- Hard to separate developmental changes from changes due to migration
- Social circumstances at home varied and we had limited information
- People may remember rosier past
- Their stories could also be influenced by
 - Desire to show “success”
 - Generate sympathy about their hard life

Effects of Migration on Sexual Risk for WI Immigrants to US

- Gender: Increased power within relationships did not seem to relate to greater sexual safety
- Structural aspects of gender: Greater protection from intimate partner violence may enhance women's safety
- Networks: Relative to experiences at home, WI immigrants' perceive access to a larger number and wider range of sexual partners
- Circular Migration: Risk may be more related to sexual networks in the US than to networks formed through circular migration and travel
- Prevention: Migration may entail greater access to prevention tools

Migration Increases Opportunities for Exposure to Risk & Opportunities for Protection

SOME PARADOXES

- Increase in protection from relationship violence may foster greater protection

BUT

- Increase in women's sexual freedom may increase risk

- Sex is more anonymous in NYC and people believe they have greater awareness of partner risks in WIs

BUT

- Opportunities for knowledge and access to protection tools are greater in NYC

Demographics Characteristics

	Women N = 36	Men N = 20
Age - median	22.5	22.5
Years in US - median	9.5	8.5
Age at Migration - median	15.0	17.5
Countries of origin		
- Jamaica	52.8	70.0
- Trinidad	25.0	10.0
- Other WI	22.2	20.0
Traveled to WI – % last year	11%	15%
Employed - % Yes	66.7%	85.0%
Ever incarcerated - % Yes	2.8	30.0

Sexual & Drug Use Risk

	Women N = 36	Men N = 20
Number of partners – past 6 mos.		
1	55.6%	15.0%
2	16.7	5.0
> 2	27.8	80.0
Unprotected vaginal sex - 6-mo. Median occasions	34	49
Unprotected anal sex – any, past 6 mos.	11.1%	5.0%
Marijuana use – past 3 mos. >= 1/wk	16.7%	40.0%
Alcohol use – past 3 mos. >= 1/wk	19.4%	50.0%