



Research Snapshot



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Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS
at Yale University

HIV Prevention Needs Among MSM in Small Urban Areas

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What is the research about?

Recent research has examined how gay and bisexual men navigate variations in sexual minority stigma that exist across diverse social-geographical contexts, and the implications for their health. This study adds to the literature on stigma, mobility, social-sexual networking, and health by considering the unique and understudied setting of the small city.

Why is this important for HIV prevention and treatment?

This research contributes to an understanding of how virtual and non-virtual spaces, stigma, and mobility can intersect to generate spatially distinct experiences of stigmatized identities and HIV-related health consequences. As both destinations and points of departure for gay and bisexual men seeking affirming environments, small cities are particularly important sites for HIV prevention interventions and related research.

What did the researchers do?

We conducted 29 in-depth semi-structured interviews with a highly diverse sample of HIV-positive and HIV-negative gay and bisexual men from two small cities in Connecticut - Hartford and New Haven. The interviews assessed broad themes related to gay and bisexual life in New Haven and Hartford, sexual and social networking, travel, and HIV risk and protective factors.

What did the researchers find?

Participants described small cities as having insular gay communities, few gay venues, and sexual minority stigma, which shaped mobility and contributed to sexual risk behavior. Some men navigated small city challenges by escaping to affirming gay enclaves, while others used social-sexual networking technologies to access affirming communities online. Still these cities served as a destination for men from small towns where sexual minority stigma was even more present.

How can you use this research?

The data suggest that movement across city and town lines and virtual and non-virtual spaces may mitigate the level of stigma experienced by gay and bisexual men, but could also result in sexual risk taking. HIV prevention professionals should aim to develop interventions that seek to leverage the health-enhancing aspects of small cities and be aware of the unique constraints faced by gay and bisexual men in these understudied areas.

Original Research Article:

Keene, D. E., Eldahan, A. I., White Hughto, J. M., & Pachankis, J. E. (2016). "The big ole gay express": sexual minority stigma, mobility and health in the small city." *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 1-14. [PubMed](#)

Other:

White Hughto, J.M., Pachankis, J.E., Edlhan, A.I., & Keene, D.E. (2016) "You can't just walk down the street and meet someone." The intersection of social-sexual networking technology, stigma, and health among gay and bisexual men in the small city." *American Journal of Men's Health*, Ahead of Print. [PubMed](#)