

Wilfrid Laurier University

## Scholars Commons @ Laurier

---

Health Sciences Faculty Publications

Health Sciences

---

2006

### “River of life, rapids of change”: Understanding HIV vulnerability among Two-Spirit youth who migrate to Toronto

Doris O'Brien Teengs

*2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations and Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy*

Robb Travers

*Wilfrid Laurier University, rtravers@wlu.ca*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholars.wlu.ca/hesc\\_faculty](https://scholars.wlu.ca/hesc_faculty)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Teengs, Doris O'Brien and Travers, Robb, "“River of life, rapids of change”: Understanding HIV vulnerability among Two-Spirit youth who migrate to Toronto" (2006). *Health Sciences Faculty Publications*. 2.  
[https://scholars.wlu.ca/hesc\\_faculty/2](https://scholars.wlu.ca/hesc_faculty/2)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Health Sciences at Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Health Sciences Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

# ***“River of Life, Rapids of Change”*: Understanding HIV Vulnerability among Two-Spirit Youth who Migrate to Toronto**

*Doris O’Brien Teengs<sup>1</sup> and Robb Travers<sup>2</sup>*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors express their gratitude to members of the Youth Migration Project team including, Carol-Anne O’Brien, Humberto Carolo, Llewellyn Goddard, Florence Heung, Andrea Ridgley, Suhail Sameed, and Kyle Scanlon. This research was made possible through funding support from Health Canada (Community-Based HIV/AIDS Research Program) as well as Toronto-based, Wellesley Central Health Corporation. We’d also like to express our appreciation to all of the youth who shared their stories with us in order to help the next generations of two-spirit youth.

## **ABSTRACT**

Like most large urban centres in Canada, Toronto is a magnet for two-spirit youth who leave reserve communities and smaller cities and towns seeking safety and a sense of community. The Youth Migration Project was a community-based research project that was formed out of increasing community concern for these youth as well as other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people. Despite increasing HIV incidence among two-spirit youth, little is understood about how their migration experiences might heighten their risk for HIV infection. We interviewed thirteen two-spirit youth to better understand how migrating to a large urban centre like Toronto is linked to heightened HIV vulnerability. We also interviewed an additional eight key informants seeking their insights into the same questions. Two-spirit youth spoke of escaping abusive, oppressive and homophobic home communities, and their dreams of a better life in Toronto. Once they arrived in Toronto, however, the illusion of an accepting and welcoming community was shattered. Racism, poverty, unemployment, unstable housing, inaccessible services, and sexual exploitation were commonly experienced by two-spirit youth. Many coped with their new situations by engaging in survival sex to pay the bills, or by using substances to cope with isolation, loss, and emotional pain. These factors can lead to potentially heightened risk situations for HIV among migrant two-spirit youth. In addition to a series of recommendations intended to meet their immediate service needs, we propose numerous strategies for longer-term change to improve quality of life for migrant two-spirit youth.

## **INTRODUCTION**

*“Life is about change. You have to move like a river. It’s not the same water, it’s always different.”*  
(male, 25, gay)

Like most large urban centres in Canada, Toronto is a magnet for two-spirit youth who leave reserve communities and smaller cities and towns seeking safety and a sense of community. The Youth Migration Project (YMP) was a community-based research project that was formed out of increasing community concern for these youth as well as other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people. Despite increasing HIV incidence among two-spirit youth, little is understood about how their migration experiences might heighten their risk for HIV infection.

<sup>1</sup> HIV/AIDS Outreach Worker, 2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations and Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy, 43 Elm St. 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Toronto, ON M5G 1H1, 416 944 9300, doe@2spirits.com

<sup>2</sup> Scientist and Director of Community-Based Research, Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 1300 Yonge St. Suite 308, Toronto, ON M4T 1X3, 416 642 6486 ext. 311, rtravers@ohntn.on.ca

This article was born out of the voices of two-spirit<sup>3</sup> youth. We found that there was a large enough sample of two-spirit youth experiences within YMP for us to make some observations and recommendations. Our hope is that these recommendations will lead to better service delivery for migrant two-spirit youth at risk of HIV infection. The partnership model utilized in the Youth Migration Project (community workers and academic researchers working in collaboration) is reflected in this article. In this article we look at the historical and social factors that impact on Aboriginal people and how two-spirit youth who migrate to Toronto become vulnerable to HIV infection.

## **ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND HIV/AIDS**

The face of the HIV epidemic in Canada is clearly changing; one extremely alarming trend is the considerable increase in new infections among Aboriginal<sup>4</sup> peoples (Archibald, Sutherland, Geduld, Sutherland & Yan, 2003). Between 1996 and 1999, the total number of Aboriginal people in Canada with HIV increased by 91%, and, in 1999 alone, they accounted for almost 9% of new HIV infections (Health Canada, 2001). By 2002, Aboriginal people accounted for approximately 12% of the total of new HIV infections, yet they represented only 3% of Canada's population (Canada Communicable Disease Report, 2003). Prior to 1993, just over 1% of reported AIDS cases were among Aboriginal peoples; by 2003, this had increased to over 13% (HIV/AIDS Epi Notes – Aboriginal Peoples, 2004). Moreover, in 1998, 19% of people testing positive were Aboriginal and by 2003, this had increased to 25% (HIV/AIDS Epi Notes – Aboriginal Peoples, 2004).

Aboriginal peoples are also acquiring HIV at a younger age compared to other groups in Canada (HIV/AIDS Epi Notes – Aboriginal Peoples, 2004). Myers et al (1993), report that 70% of Aboriginal youth are sexually active by the time they are 15 years old but less than 20% are using condoms consistently. According to the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (2004, p.3), “30% of Aboriginal HIV infections are among youth between 20-29 years old (compared to only 20% in the non-Aboriginal population), and research indicates that the potential for the virus to spread among youth is enormous.”

Compared to other young gay and bisexual men in Canada, those who are Aboriginal are more likely to be unemployed and impoverished, on social assistance, in unstable housing, and relying on sex trade work to survive (Heath et al, 1999). They are also at greater risk of sero-converting over time compared to non-Aboriginal youth (Weber, Chan et al, 2001; Weber, Craib, et al, 2001). One author contends that “many young two-spirit men who migrate to Vancouver are becoming infected with HIV within 2 years” (McLeod, 1997).

## **LGBT PEOPLE AND MIGRATION**

In recent years, a new body of literature has begun to emerge on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and migration. This literature is allowing for reconceptualizations of sexual identity, geography and migration (Altman, 2001; Bell & Valentine, 1995; Ingram et al, 1997; Parker & Gagnon, 1995). Herdt (1997) argues that existing models of sexuality and the life course from Kinsey onward assume a stable geography. Espin (1997) elaborates on this theme in her discussion of immigrant Latina lesbians, observing that migration often occasions shifts in sexual and gender identity; which may be a particularly difficult process to negotiate for those migrating during adolescence.

Some scholars have elaborated a notion of “queer diasporas” and charted the internationalization of gay identities (Altman, 2001; Gopinath, 1996; Parker et al, 1992; Patton, 1994; Stychin, 2000). To explore the ways in which sexuality figures in the decision to migrate, some scholars consider how migration processes may be shaped by

<sup>3</sup> In this article two-spirit means a gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender Aboriginal person. The term two-spirit was coined by Aboriginal lesbian and gay people in the late 1980s to refer to Aboriginal (First Nations and Métis, but not including Inuit) people who traditionally held either a special gender or social status in their respective cultures. As an English word, it crosses the cultural boundaries of Aboriginal cultures (there were and are slight differences in cultural beliefs and practices in North America with regards to this issue [Deschamps, 1998]).

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this article, Aboriginal is inclusive of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

the recent development of an international gay culture, and by the construction of “gay capitals” such as San Francisco, New York and Amsterdam (Altman, 2001; Parker, 1999; Weston, 1998). There is some evidence that countries such as Canada and Australia, both of which have relatively open immigration policies with respect to lesbians and gay men, may attract migration by LGBT people for that reason (Myers et al, 2001; Peter and Sullivan, 1998; Stychin, 2000). Parker (1999) and Weston (1998) explore how LGBT migration is linked to a “gay imaginary” of urban gay life. Parker’s work on men who have sex with men in Brazil (1999) locates this within the social, economic and political processes that shape migration patterns generally. Weston (1998), Patton (1994) and Espin (1997) also link sexual migration to social and economic contexts and point out that it has implications for individual sexual/gender identities as well as for community formation.

This international literature has resonance in Canada, where gay villages in large cities – particularly Toronto - have attracted migrants from across the country. Based on initial statistical modelling (but validated by data from the Omega Cohort Study of Seronegative Men in Montreal), 57% of Montreal’s gay male population were born outside of the province of Quebec. The proportion of migrants in Toronto’s LGBT communities would be higher given that it is an even larger migration centre than Montreal and given its relatively new status as one of the world’s major urban gay centres (Remis, personal communication, 2002).

## **ABORIGINAL PEOPLE & MIGRATION**

Migration has been very significant in the history of Aboriginal people in Canada (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Vernon, 2001). Contemporary Aboriginal communities in Canada continue to be highly mobile, with one study indicating that 25% of Aboriginal people in Toronto had recently migrated from other communities in the recent past (Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy, 1996). These migrations take place for a variety of social and economic reasons (Proceedings of “Healing Our Nations”, 1996).

Two-spirit people and Aboriginal PHAs (including youth) encounter additional pressures to leave their communities. The literature suggests that homophobia and negative reactions to PHAs on reserves combined with a lack of health and social services lead Aboriginal people to move to urban areas (Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy, 1996; McLeod, 1997). The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (2004) maintains that while migrating to large urban centres puts Aboriginal youth at risk for HIV, it also serves as a means of coping with the hardships of racism, colonization, violence and poverty. Deschamps (1998) states: “As two-spirited men, you know there is no room for your life on the reserve. Your sexuality is not tolerated and many men leave to find urban centres where they can express themselves.” In a survey of 658 people in First Nations communities in Ontario, it was reported that “...the majority of respondents felt that homosexuality was wrong, and believed their family and community to support this view” (Myers et al, 1993).

Some researchers document the positive role of migration in identity formation for two-spirit people across North America (Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy, 1996; Deschamps, 1998; Medicine, 1997; Weston, 1998). It has been argued that HIV vulnerability is not due to migration itself, but to broader social and economic inequalities that mark the lives of those who migrate (Haour-Knipe & Rector, 1996, Sabatier, 1996). Others are concerned that processes of migration, return and re-migration facilitate the transmission of HIV among Aboriginal people (Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, 1998). The impact of migration has also been identified as particularly serious for two-spirit youth who are often unable to find employment, who lack other resources and must turn to the sex trade for survival (Deschamps, 1998; McLeod, 1997).

## **THIS STUDY**

A key challenge in HIV prevention is understanding the unique vulnerabilities of two-spirit youth in relation to HIV infection. Indeed, little is known about this vulnerable group of youth. Understanding increased infection rates in a marginalized population demands that we move beyond psychological explanations such as the myth that youth believe themselves to be invulnerable to HIV infection (see, for example, Hays, Kegeles & Coates,

1990; Yarber & Sanders, 1998) to situate HIV risk in a broader social context of poverty and other forms of inequality (Namaste, 1999; Trussler & Marchand, 1997). Increasingly, evidence suggests that broader social factors (e.g., race and ethnicity, housing, poverty, etc.) are associated with increased risk for HIV infection among gay youth (Greenland et al, 1996; Denning, Jones & Ward, 1997; Travers & Paoletti, 1999). Moreover, little is understood about the role of migration to large urban centres like Toronto in understanding HIV vulnerability among two-spirit youth. It is this gap that this study intends to fill.

## **METHOD**

Data were drawn from the Youth Migration Project, a community-based research (CBR) project comprised of seven community and two university-based investigators who came together to better understand HIV vulnerability among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and two-spirit youth who migrate to Toronto from other parts of the world, and from smaller cities and towns, rural areas and reserve communities in Canada. Included in the team investigators is the principal author, Doris O'Brien Teengs, who is of mixed heritage of Cree and Irish Canadian descent and is a member of the Weenusk First Nation. Doris currently works at Toronto-based 2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations and the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy as an HIV/AIDS Outreach Worker. She joined the Youth Migration Project during the project formulation phase. The co-author, Robb Travers currently works at the Toronto-based Ontario HIV Treatment Network as Director of Community-Based Research. Robb was one of the initiators of YMP and served as Co-Principal Investigator for the life of the study.

Confidential and in-depth individual interviews and focus groups were held with 82 youth and 18 key informants. In the initial phase of YMP the team consulted key informants (Aboriginal and Métis workers and youth) to determine research priorities and questions specific to two-spirit youth. The YMP team then developed the questions and parameters for the interviews and the focus groups, which was then fine-tuned by the Principal Investigators.

Informed consent was obtained prior to participating in an interview or focus group. Study objectives were fully explained to participants, consent forms were administered by the interviewer or the focus group facilitator, and study participants received a stipend of \$20.00 for their participation. Following the interviews, youth were provided with counselling supports and resources if necessary. Interviews were taped and transcribed and the data were managed using FOLIO Views 4.2 Electronic Publishing Software. The Youth Migration Project received ethics review approval from the Research Ethics Board of Ryerson University in Toronto.

This paper draws on the data from thirteen two-spirit youth, 90% of whom had migrated to Toronto within the previous five years, and who ranged in age from 18 to 25. Data from an additional eight key informants (including Aboriginal youth workers, HIV/AIDS workers, and policy experts), are also included.

Numerous principles of CBR guided the work of YMP. Of particular significance, was our desire to ensure that community team members felt ownership of the research and its outcomes. To accomplish this, community-based investigators led discussions about the 'meanings' emerging from the data. In keeping with the CBR principle of capacity-building (Narciso, Travers, Mumford & Edwards, 2002), it was important for the Principal Investigators to demystify research processes; thus, we conducted a series of participatory data analysis sessions where all team members were involved in a thorough reading of select transcripts (i.e., those most relevant to their communities and in this case, any data from two-spirit youth included Doris O'Brien Teengs). In these sessions, we worked collaboratively to interpret data, to identify themes, and to make recommendations for change.

In order to give priority to the voices and lived experience of two-spirit youth, their quotes are largely used in the following section.

## FINDINGS

### “Turbulent Waters” – Why Two-Spirit Youth Migrate to Toronto

Two-spirit youth recounted many reasons for leaving their home communities, including experiencing oppression, violence and anti-gay discrimination. As one young man succinctly stated “the streets are safer than home” and as one key informant stated “homophobia drives youth away from reserves and other communities.” When faced with this unrelenting storm on a daily basis, youth leave because it is an alternative to suicide – an escape from hopeless situations.

*“I was tormented all the way until I was in the ninth grade.”* (trans mtf – male to female – youth, 22)

*“I moved here because the reserve that I’m from... they’re totally against gay or bisexual people. I lived pretty much my whole life trying to pretend to be straight. I had enough of it.”* (male, 19, bisexual)

Parents and siblings were often homophobic, mirroring attitudes present in the broader community.

*“I had the worst time coming out of the closet in my reserve. They gay-bashed and everything. My family dropped me... my cousins, my friends... basically I was driven off of the reserve.”* (male, 25, gay)

### “Looking for Fair Weather” – Why Two-Spirit Youth Migrate to Toronto

Another significant reason for leaving their home communities lay in the desire to find a supportive and safe place to live out their lives. The anonymity offered by a large urban centre like Toronto made the big city highly desirable.

*“I want to be able to land an apartment and go to work and lead a normal life like everybody else... and know that I have a warm home to come home to.”* (male, 25, gay)

The decision to move to Toronto was most often made in haste. There was little time to plan and youth often left with little money in their pockets. Consequently, they were usually ill-prepared for life in the big city.

*“Someone bought me the ticket and then I just came here with a purse. I got on a bus for Toronto.”*  
(trans mtf, 16)

### “Paddling Upstream”: Life in Toronto

There were many challenges facing youth when they arrived in Toronto. Their dream of a safe place to live out their lives was quickly replaced by the reality of a large and expensive city where racism, exploitation and loneliness were commonly experienced. Most were ill-prepared for this and were shocked by landlords who refused to rent apartments, employers who refused to hire them, and the brutality of quickly becoming homeless.

*“I had hell when I first moved here. I thought it was going to be easy. It wasn’t. It was really hard.”*  
(male, 23, gay)

While a very small minority found employment and housing, life quickly became a game of survival for the majority. Some stayed with friends for short periods of time, moving around from one place to another, while others relied on sexual partners they met to provide temporary shelter.



*“I never stayed in shelters... If I went out, I picked up and I went home with that guy. Or, I went to the bathhouse.”* (male, 24, gay)

*“I came with somebody and they used prostitution to get by. I didn’t. I just used resources...the food banks... anywhere to go... just at least to get a bite to eat.”* (male, 19, gay)

Given the instability of these temporary housing situations, many ended up on the street for periods of time.

*“There was this one point in time where I was living under a bridge.”* (trans mtf youth, 16)

### **“Someone’s Else’s Big Waters” – We’re not Welcome Here....**

Youth and key informants frequently spoke of the racism toward two-spirit youth that was commonplace in the mainstream gay community. They spoke of the search for community, of the struggle to be accepted, and of trying to fit in.

*“I found a community that was extremely unhealthy. I went into a gay community that revolved around alcohol or drugs. ...You’re looking at acceptance. You’re finding out about the hierarchy of the community. And if you don’t fit in within those particular specifics, then you’re fucked even more. ...If you’re not wearing Calvin Klein underwear then you’re fucked. So you open yourself up to even more criticisms, and more at-risk behaviours.”* (male, 24, gay)

Many youth found a social gay community that they could participate in which revolved around the party scene; consequently, many of the two-spirit youth in this study developed problems with alcohol and drugs and many recounted their own struggles or those of their friends.

*“Probably just the alcoholism. Somebody is so blasted and someone takes them home and corrupts their little life. They don’t realize that it feels good for the moment but what about the after-effects?”* (male, 25, gay)

### **“A Dam in the River...”**

Two-spirit youth in this study also encountered barriers when they sought out services. Attitudes toward two-spirit people tended to emulate those of their home communities and they were further marginalized by Aboriginal people. Incidents of homophobic discrimination in mainstream Aboriginal agencies were common and this furthered their sense of alienation and isolation from the larger Aboriginal community.

*“I prefer to come here (two-spirit program) because it’s safer. You know what I mean? I don’t get called a ‘faggot’ and I don’t get stared down at when I’m walking down the street because I’m not trying to hide who I am.”* (male, 25, gay).

Rarely were they referred to an agency where they could receive services such as those offered by 2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations.

*“I didn’t know about this place until six months later. Nobody talked about it. I never used to see it. I went to all the Native agencies in Toronto and I never saw anything about two-spirits... no postings, nothing.”* (male, 25, gay)

## **“Murky Waters” – Sexual Exploitation**

Some of the youth in this study had been exploited sexually by older white males after arriving in the city. Their alienation and isolation left them lonely and vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

*“This guy brought me there. He was asking for sex. I looked around and everywhere I looked there were cockroaches. He told me that he wasn’t a pedophile... that he was a really nice guy and that he would like to help me.”* (trans mtf, 16)

Another youth recounted how he would have unprotected sex when he was drunk.

*“It usually happens when I’m drunk. When I’m in a different state of mind because you’re a whole different person when you’re drunk.”* (male, 25, gay)

These examples illustrate the loneliness of two-spirit youth and their vulnerability which can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Most of the youth in the study were unhappy with their new lives and felt uncertain about their futures. In fact, most of the youth did not choose to think about the future beyond one or two days.

*“I can’t remember the last time I was happy and carefree and I didn’t have to worry. The day will come eventually, hopefully.”* (male, 19, bisexual)

## **“It’s in the water” – What’s the HIV connection?**

Aboriginal communities experience a wide range of challenges including poverty, violence, suicide and hopelessness. The legacy of residential schools has also left many with negative assumptions about same-sex attraction. The widespread sexual abuse that occurred makes it difficult for many to have a healthy view of sexuality. Instead, sexuality has become a source of shame and pain. Complicating matters is that community members might even perceive people with same-sex attractions to be potential perpetrators.

The migration experiences of two-spirit youth are precipitated by a desire to find a safe and welcoming place to live out their lives. Unlike youth raised in cities, two-spirit youth have no access to visible role models in their home communities, they have few places to hide if they are discovered or suspected, and they experience considerable and persistent harassment. For those youth in very small communities, this may mean that everyone in town knows of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Homophobia in their families and in their broader home communities leaves them little choice but to migrate to the city. This can lead to a crisis, and services for two-spirit youth are rare outside of large urban centres. Some of these youth migrate to Toronto, arriving without a plan or direction, and as a result of quitting school early and possessing few job skills, they are ill-equipped to deal with the pace of urban life and its realities.

Thus, two-spirit youth start out searching for a safe place to explore and live out their gay, bisexual, or trans identities and instead encounter inequality and discrimination at almost every turn. Many end up feeling as if they don’t matter and that their lives are unimportant. The end result is isolation from their home communities, from the urban Aboriginal communities and a profound loss of cultural identity.

Because they do not need a resume, many two-spirit youth turn to the sex trade to survive, while others find themselves in a gay social scene which revolves around drug and alcohol use. Some of them are sexually exploited either because they are intoxicated or simply because they are emotionally vulnerable. Irrespective of the particular outcome, these are all situations where the risk for HIV infection is heightened. When two-spirit youth are in a situation where survival depends on other people’s generosity, or where harmful amounts of alcohol or drugs are used as coping strategies, these youth become vulnerable to HIV. Moreover, when housing, food, money and personal safety are more immediate and urgent concerns, the ability or desire to protect



oneself in risk situations lessens. Taken in combination, these factors must be attended to in order to lessen HIV vulnerability among two-spirit youth.

### **“Building New Bridges” – Recommendations:**

Improving conditions for migrant two-spirit youth will involve addressing the broad social determinants of health that heighten their risk for HIV including housing, poverty, and social exclusion (in this case, homophobia in their home communities which precipitates migration, further marginalization in urban Aboriginal agencies, and the racism they encounter in gay communities in Toronto). 2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations has embarked upon an initiative to eliminate homophobia in Aboriginal communities. They have developed a ‘Two-spirits 101’ curriculum to offer organizations. One version includes anti-racism training for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender services, while another is designed for mainstream Aboriginal agencies or other services offering programming to Aboriginal clients.

Youth do not often arrive in Toronto with a high school diploma. In order to enhance literacy skills among two-spirit youth, targeted culturally-relevant and sensitive initiatives in urban centres such as Toronto are urgently needed.

While attending to these more systemic issues will take time and concerted advocacy efforts, immediate steps can be taken to enhance the ability of migrant two-spirit youth to survive in large urban centres like Toronto. More immediate solutions include the development of resources for service providers that provide practical advice on working with two-spirit youth including a list of local resources to meet their needs. Similar resources should be developed for youth that advise them of local counselling services, HIV programs, available housing options, and food banks.

Two-spirit youth also require programs and resources designed to restore their cultural identities. These resources can be web-based or in print form but should attend to rebuilding a positive sense of two-spirit culture and identity. These programs would also have to take into consideration the high percentage of Aboriginal youth that have been adopted and fostered into non-Aboriginal families who are searching for their roots and have a tenuous connection to Aboriginal people.

Two-spirit youth also require support and social venues that are youth-friendly and specific. Currently, many two-spirit youth socialize and receive support services alongside adults (again increasing their risk of adult exploitation). Youth-specific support services should be designed in a manner to facilitate learning about two-spirit issues, positive Aboriginal identity, and traditional cultural teachings. Other components would include communicating with family, harm reduction counselling for substance use and sessions dedicated to learning about HIV. Strategies that enhance outreach services are urgent for street-involved two-spirit youth. These should be inclusive of peer-based components designed to reach youth and hook them up to available services.

Finally, two-spirit youth require prevention programming tailored to their specific needs and concerns. The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (2004, p.5) noted a tendency in HIV prevention materials targeted at Aboriginal peoples to treat them all as if they were a “homogeneous group.” Two-spirit youth, in particular, have unique HIV prevention needs and further research is required to determine the scope of these needs and the most culturally-appropriate means of delivering them.

### **RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

There are also some study limitations that should be taken into consideration when reviewing our data, our interpretations, and our recommendations. The Youth Migration Project limited its focus to youth who moved to Toronto. As such, it may be challenging to apply our findings across the board in other urban settings. We would suggest that you take what appears potentially useful and applicable and augment it by considering the particularities of your own urban setting.

Another limitation of our research is that we relied on snowball sampling methods to reach youth: initially, youth were contacted via flyers posted in youth-serving agencies and email listservs and we relied on their contacts to reach other youth. This was a purposeful strategy in that it was very difficult (due to mistrust of researchers) to reach even this small sample of two-spirit youth. Our final sample was well-connected to services and as a result, the 'stories of resilience and survival' that are surely out there, did not get included in our study. Despite these limitations, however, there were clear themes and consistencies in the youths' stories. This suggests to us that migrating to a large urban centre like Toronto has a clear and predictable set of outcomes that put two-spirit youth at considerable risk for HIV infection.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

There is a need for further research to untangle the complexities of HIV vulnerability among migrant two-spirit youth as they negotiate life in urban settings. The pathway to HIV infection among two-spirit youth is long and complex and commands the development of culturally-appropriate methods that allow for longer-term engagement with youth. Immediate efforts should be focussed on culturally-appropriate HIV prevention programming for these youth, including the development of peer-based components.

## **CONCLUSION**

Two-spirit youth who migrate to Toronto encountered a multitude of unique life experiences that challenge the stability of their housing, the ability to make an adequate income, the expectations of food security, and safety. Youth were subjected to exploitation and may rely on sex trade to survive. While getting 'sucked' into the scene, alcohol and drug use may be adopted as coping strategies leading to further complications brought on by the development of chaotic substance use. The combination of these factors renders them vulnerable to HIV infection. Ameliorating these risks for migrant two-spirit youth will require longer-term strategies, concerted advocacy efforts, and immediate program development. In combination, these strategies will ultimately improve quality of life for migrant two-spirit youth and reduce HIV incidence.

## **REFERENCES**

- Altman, D. (2001). *Global Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Archibald, CP., Sutherland, J., Geduld, J., Sutherland, D., & Yan, P. (2003). Combining data sources to monitor the HIV epidemic in Canada. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*, 32 (Suppl 1), S24-32.
- Bell, D. & Valentine, G., eds. (1995). *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Canada Communicable Disease Report (2003). Ottawa: Health Canada, Population and Public Health Branch. December, 2003, Vol. 29.
- Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. (1998). *Learning from Our Past, Planning for Our Future: HIV/AIDS Aboriginal Skills Building Forum*. Ottawa: CAAN.
- Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. (2004). *HIV Prevention: Messages for Aboriginal Youth*. Ottawa: CAAN.
- Denning, P.H., Jones, J.L., & Ward, J.W. (1997). Recent trends in the HIV epidemic in adolescent and young adult gay and bisexual men. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes & Human Retrovirology*, 16, 374-379.

- Deschamps, G. (1998). *We Are Part of a Tradition: A Guide on Two-Spirited People for First Nations Communities*. Toronto: 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations.
- Espin, O. (1997). Crossing borders and boundaries: The life narratives of immigrant lesbians. In Beverley Greene, ed., *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Among Lesbians and Gay Men*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Gopinath, G. (1996). Funny boys and girls: Notes on a queer South Asian planet. In Russell Leong, ed., *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*. New York: Routledge.
- Greenland, S., Lieb, L., Simon, P., Ford, W., & Kerndt, P. (1996). Evidence for recent growth of the HIV epidemic among African-American men and younger male cohorts in Los Angeles County. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes & Human Retrovirology*, 11, 401-409.
- Haour-Knipe, M., & Richard, R. eds. (1996.) *Crossing Borders: Migration, Ethnicity and AIDS*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Hays, R.B., Kegeles, S.M., & Coates, T.J. (1990). High HIV risk-taking among young gay men. *AIDS*, 4, 901-907.
- Heath, K.V., Cornelisse, P.G.A., Strathdee, S.A., Palepu, A., Miller, M.L., Schechter, M.T., O'Shaughnessy, M.V., & Hogg, R.S. (1999). HIV-associated risk factors among young Canadian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men who have sex with men. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 10, 582-587.
- Health Canada (2001). *HIV/AIDS Epi Update May, 2001 (National HIV prevalence and incidence estimates for 1999: No evidence of a decline in overall incidence)*. Ottawa: Bureau of HIV/AIDS, STD and TB Update Series. Centre for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control.
- Herd, G. ed. (1997) *Sexual Cultures and Migration in the Era of AIDS: Anthropological and Demographical perspectives*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- HIV/AIDS Epi Notes – Aboriginal Peoples. (2004). *Understanding the HIV/AIDS Epidemic among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: The Community at a Glance*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.
- Ingram, G., Bouthillette, B. & Retter, Y. (1997). *Queers in Space: Communities/Public Places/Sites of Resistance*. Seattle: Bay Press.
- McLeod, A. (1997). *Aboriginal Communities and HIV/AIDS: A Joint Project with the Canadian AIDS Society and the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. Final Report*. Ottawa: Canadian AIDS Society.
- Medicine, B. (1997). Changing Native American roles in an urban context and changing Native American sex roles in an urban context. In Sue-Ellen Jacobs et al, eds., *Two Spirit People*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Myers, T., Calzavara, L., Cockerill, R., Marshall, V.W., Bullock, S.L., & the First Nations Steering Committee. (1993). *Ontario First Nations AIDS and Health Lifestyle Survey*. Ottawa: National AIDS Clearinghouse, Canadian Public Health Association.
- Myers., T., Travers, R., Allman, D., Lau, W., Maxwell, J., & Calzavara, L. (2001). *An HIV\_Research Needs Assessment of MSM in Ethno-Cultural Communities: Perspectives of Volunteers and Service Providers*. Toronto: HIV Social, Behavioural and Epidemiological Studies Unit, University of Toronto.

- Namaste, V. K. (1999). HIV/AIDS and female-to-male transsexuals and transvestites: Results for a needs assessment in Quebec. *The International Journal of Transgenderism. Special Issue on Transgender and HIV: Risks: Prevention and Care* 3 (1 and 2).
- Narciso, L., Travers, R., Mumford, B., & Edwards, S. (2001). *Community-Based Research: An Approach to Building Sustainable Capacities in the HIV/AIDS Community*. Poster presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Inner City Health. Toronto.
- Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy. (1996). *Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy*. Toronto. Parker, R. G. & Gagnon, J. H., eds. (1995). *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Parker, A., Russo, M., Sommer, D. & Yeager, P. (1992). *Nationalisms and Sexualities*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Parker, R. (1999). *Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality, and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil*. New York: Routledge.
- Patton, C. (1994). *Last Served? Gendering the HIV Pandemic*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Peter, J. L. & G. Sullivan, eds. (1998). *Multicultural Queer: Australian Narratives*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Proceedings of "Healing Our Nations" (1996). 4th Canadian Aboriginal Conference on HIV/AIDS and Related Issues. Halifax.
- Remis, R.S. (2002). Unpublished statistical modeling migration data. Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto.
- Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services.
- Sabatier, R. (1996). Migrants and AIDS: Themes of vulnerability and resistance. In M. Haour-Knipe and R. Rector, eds., *Crossing Borders: Migration, Ethnicity and AIDS*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Stychin, C. (2000). 'A stranger to its laws'. Sovereign bodies, global sexualities, and transnational citizens. *Journal of Law and Society*, 27, 601-625.
- Travers, R., & Paoletti, D. (1999). Responding to the support needs of HIV positive lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 8 (4), 271-283.
- Trussler, T. and Marchand, R. (1997). *Field Guide. Community-Based HIV Health Promotion*. Ottawa: Health Canada/AIDS Vancouver.
- Vernon, I.S. (2001). *Native Americans and HIV/AIDS*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Weber, A.E., Chan, K., George, C., Hogg, R.S., Remis, R.S., Martindale, S., Otis, J., Miller, L., Vincelette, J., Craib, K.J.P., Mâsse, B., Schechter, M.T., Leclerc, R., Lavoie, R., Turmel, B., Parent, R., & Alary, M. (2001). Risk factors associated with HIV infection among young gay and bisexual men in Canada. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*, 28, 81-88.
- Weber, A.E., Craib, K.J.P., Chan, K., Martindale, S., Miller, M.L., Schechter, M., & Hogg, R.S. (2001). Sex trade involvement and rates of human immunodeficiency virus positivity among young gay and bisexual men. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 30, 1449-1454.

- Weston, K. (1998). Get thee to a big city: Sexual imaginary and the great gay migration. In K. Weston. *Longslowburn: Sexuality and Social Science*. New York: Routledge.
- Yarber, W. L., & Sanders, S. A. (1998). Rural adolescent views of HIV prevention: Focus groups at two Indiana rural 4-H clubs. *The Education Health Monograph 16* (2), 1-6.