

research snapshot

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East and Southeast Asian Men and Bathhouses in Toronto

What is this research about?

Bathhouses are a type of venue where men go to meet other men for sex. The reasons are usually for casual and/or anonymous relations. In the field of public health, bathhouses bring on concerns about the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV. Previous research has looked at sexual behaviours at bathhouses, including practices with anal sex. But there are very few studies that address the experiences of ethno-racial groups like East and Southeast Asian men.

What did the researchers do?

The research study was a collaboration between York University and the Asian Community AIDS Services in Toronto. An advisory group was set up to guide the research, with 8 community members. The researchers were interested in exploring HIV-testing history, casual sex behaviour, and condom use by East and Southeast Asian men. They visited a popular bathhouse for men of this ethno-racial group between February and May 2006. At different points of the day, they recruited visitors to complete a survey and interview in private.

There were 101 participants, all of whom identified as gay or bisexual. They included

What you need to know:

HIV prevention needs to reflect the diverse experiences of gay men at bathhouses, especially those from ethno-racial groups.

Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese men between 20 to 53 years old. Out of all the participants, only 3 men reported being HIV positive.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that over 80 percent of the men surveyed reported doing HIV testing in the past. However, among this group, 23.5 percent said that their last HIV test was two years ago or more. Out of all the men surveyed, 86 reported having anal sex with a casual partner, although 29.1 percent did not always or never used a condom.

All the men surveyed who used condoms cited STI/HIV prevention as a reason to do so. Their other reasons included: hygiene, unfamiliar partner, a partner's choice, uneasiness without

a condom, or caution after receiving an STI. The reasons men chose not to use a condom were more varied. They included: their sex partner appeared healthy, they were carried away by the moment, or they preferred bareback sex.

The researchers found it was a major concern that many men did not have an HIV test within the last two years. While very few participants reported having HIV, they were still at a high risk for infection. The researchers suggested that culturally relevant strategies should be considered to prevent HIV infection. These include:

- HIV testing and counselling that is accessible to different languages;
- HIV test access at venues like bathhouses;
- Refuting the assumption that a partner's appearance reflects their HIV status.

How can you use this research?

his research may be useful for personnel in the public health industry, especially those who do work with sexual health. Front line workers in the area of prevention may consider forming strategies that are culturally relevant to communities like East and Southeast Asians. They may also consider how to develop specific strategies that reflect diverse sexualities and sexual relations. Policymakers in the area of public health may also consider this research useful in identifying existing health needs that they can allocate funding and support towards.

About the Researchers

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