Emerging HIV epidemics in men who have sex with men in the Middle East and North Africa

HIV epidemics are emerging among men who have sex with men (a term that encompasses gay, non-gay identified homosexual men, transgendered, and bisexual men) in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Importantly, the high level of risky sexual behavior practiced by many men who have sex with men in these countries indicates that they could become the pivotal risk group for HIV sexual transmission in this region.

These are among the key findings of a detailed and comprehensive review and data synthesis (the first of its kind in this region) led by Laith Abu-Raddad and Ghina Mumtaz from the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Group at the Weill Cornell Medical College in Doha, Qatar. The study, published in this week’s *PLoS Medicine*, stresses the urgent need for countries in the Middle East and North Africa to expand HIV surveillance and access to HIV testing, prevention, and treatment services for men who have sex with men, to limit the size of the HIV epidemic, and to prevent the chains of HIV transmission from reaching other population groups.

The authors identified relevant published studies and collected and analyzed data from country-level and international organization reports and databases, governmental and nongovernmental organization publications, and various other institutional documents to find that, contrary to widely held perceptions, there is considerable and increasing epidemiological evidence on HIV and risk behavior among men who have sex with men in this region.

The prevalence of HIV infection among men who have sex with men was low in several countries but high in others, with evidence for concentrated epidemics (HIV prevalence greater than 5%) in several countries such as Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia. In one setting in Pakistan, HIV prevalence reached up to 28%. Moreover, by 2008, transmission of HIV via the route of anal sex among men was responsible for more than a quarter of notified cases of HIV in several countries in the region. Not all countries,
however, conducted studies to assess the level of HIV infection among their men who have sex with men population, thereby limiting the understanding of the full scale of the problem in the region.

Roughly 2-3% of males were found to engage in anal sex with other males, a rate that is comparable to that in other regions. These males were typically involved in several types of HIV-related high risk behavior. For example, they had between 4 and 14 sexual partners in the past six months and their rates of consistent condom use were generally below 25%. In addition, between 20% and 75.5% of men who have sex with men exchanged sex for money, and these men commonly had several female sexual partners.

The authors stressed that given the spectre of expanding epidemics among men who have sex with men, and a narrowing window of opportunity to prevent further epidemics, policy makers in the Middle East and North Africa should address this growing health challenge from a public health perspective. Few countries in the region have already developed creative means of dealing with this public health issue through empowerment of non-governmental organizations that deliver services to this highly hidden population. These programs need to be expanded in scale and initiated in the rest of the countries to achieve the desired coverage for a substantial impact.

Funding: The MENA HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Synthesis Project was funded through a joint partnership of the World Bank, the MENA Regional Support Team (RST) of United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) of the World Health Organization (WHO). GM and LJA are grateful to the Qatar National Research Fund for supporting this work (NPRP 08-068-3-024 and NPRP 4-924-3-251), and the support provided by the Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Biomathematics Research Core at the Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.


IN YOUR COVERAGE PLEASE USE THIS URL TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE FREELY AVAILABLE PAPER:
http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1000444


CONTACT:
Laith Abu-Raddad & Ghina Mumtaz
Infectious Disease Epidemiology Group
Weill Cornell Medical College – Qatar
Cornell University
Doha, Qatar
http://qatar-weill.cornell.edu/research/faculty/abuRaddad/InfectiousDiseaseEpidemiologyGroup.html

Individual contact details:
Laith Abu-Raddad
Up to July 29, 2011 (USA): + 1 (202) 460 9125
Starting July 30, 2011 (Qatar): + (974) 4492 8321 (Office); + (974) 6649 8276 (Mobile)
lja2002@qatar-med.cornell.edu

Ghina Mumtaz
Up to July 29, 2011 (USA): + 1 (206) 422 5045
Starting July 30, 2011 (Qatar): + (974) 4492 8406 (Office); + (974) 6605 5435 (Mobile)
gim2006@qatar-med.cornell.edu

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Limited guidance available on reporting survey research
In this week's *PLoS Medicine*, Carol Bennett of the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute in Ottawa, Canada and colleagues report that there is limited guidance and no consensus on the optimal reporting of survey research, and that many key criteria in survey studies are under-reported. As in other areas of research, poor reporting compromises both transparency and reproducibility, two fundamental principles of research.

The authors say: “Our findings highlight the need for a well developed reporting guideline for survey research — possibly an extension of the guideline for observational studies in epidemiology (STROBE) — that will provide the structure to ensure more complete reporting and allow clearer review and interpretation of the results from surveys.”

Funding: Funding, in the form of salary support, was provided by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research [MGC – 42668]. The funder had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.


IN YOUR COVERAGE PLEASE USE THIS URL TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE FREELY AVAILABLE PAPER: http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1001069


CONTACT:
Carol Bennett
Ottawa Hospital Research Institute
Clinical Epidemiology Program
1053 Carling Avenue
ASB Level 1
Ottawa, ON K1Y 4E9
CANADA
+1 613 798 5555
cbennett@ohri.ca

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

FROM THE *PLOS MEDICINE* MAGAZINE

Guest authorship, a form of ghost writing, constitutes legal fraud

“Guest authorship is a disturbing violation of academic integrity standards, which form the basis of scientific reliability” state two law experts in a robust attack on this unethical practice in a policy article in this week’s *PLoS Medicine*—a practice which the authors also argue constitutes legal fraud.

Simon Stern and Trudo Lemmens from the Faculties of Law and Medicine at the University of Toronto, Canada argue that it is irrelevant whether publications with academic guest authors are factually accurate. Rather, ghostwriting of medical journal articles raises serious ethical and legal concerns, bearing on the integrity of medical research and scientific evidence used in legal disputes. Furthermore, the false respectability afforded to claims of safety and effectiveness through the use of academic investigators risks undermining the integrity of biomedical research and patient care—an integrity that also underpins the use of scientific evidence in the courtroom.

According to the authors, medical journals, academic institutions, and professional disciplinary bodies have failed to enforce effective sanctions. Some journals, such as *PLoS Medicine*, have called for bans
on future submissions by authors who act as guests, formal retraction if unacknowledged ghostwriting is discovered after publication, and reporting of authors’ misconduct to institutions. Although the authors agree that such actions may have an impact on academics concerned about their status and future publication options, they say that it is unclear whether journals can adequately monitor the practice.

Consequently, the authors make the case for more effectively deterring the practice of ghostwriting through the imposition of legal liability on the “guest authors” who lend their names to ghostwritten articles. The authors say: “We argue that a guest author’s claim for credit of an article written by someone else constitutes legal fraud, and may give rise to claims that could be pursued in a class action based on the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act [RICO].”

The authors continue: “The same fraud could support claims of “fraud on the court” against a pharmaceutical company that has used ghostwritten articles in litigation. This claim also appropriately reflects the negative impact of ghostwriting on the legal system.”

Funding: The research is supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council on The Promotion of Integrity in Biomedical Research. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.


doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001070

IN YOUR COVERAGE PLEASE USE THIS URL TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE FREELY AVAILABLE PAPER:
http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1001070


CONTACT:
Simon Stern
University of Toronto
Faculty of Law
84 Queens Park
Toronto, Ontario
Canada
simon.stern@utoronto.ca

About PLoS Medicine

*PLoS Medicine* is an open access, freely available international medical journal. It publishes original research that enhances our understanding of human health and disease, together with commentary and analysis of important global health issues. For more information, visit [http://www.plosmedicine.org](http://www.plosmedicine.org)

About the Public Library of Science

The Public Library of Science (PLoS) is a non-profit organization of scientists and physicians committed to making the world's scientific and medical literature a freely available public resource. For more information, visit [http://www.plos.org](http://www.plos.org)
HIV epidemic emerging in Middle East MSM; Ghost writing is legal fraud

http://hosted.verticalresponse.com/609780/20f8d06f8f/289803557/467...