HIV among MSM in Barbados: “Bullers” and “Battybowys,” Context and Evidence

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What is the Caribbean?
Eastern Caribbean-Community Access Project

- To describe “most at risk populations” and contexts of HIV risk
- To promote evidence-based HIV services in the Eastern Caribbean
- Countries: St. Kitts, St. Vincent & Grenadines, Antigua, and Barbados
HIV in the Caribbean

- HIV prevalence in the region: 1-2%
- Main reported route of transmission is heterosexual sex
- Half of the population with HIV in the Caribbean are women (UNAIDS)
- Under-reporting of HIV and AIDS due to stigma
Barbados

• Population of 294,000 (2007)
• Independence from Britain in 1966
• Tourism, offshore banking, financial services, light industry
• Highest per capita income in the region and high literacy rate
• 7.7% unemployment rate (last quarter, 2008)
HIV in Barbados

• 3408 cumulative HIV cases (2007)
• 80% of HIV cases in between 20-49 y. o.
• Increased feminization of the HIV epidemic
• Out of 163 reported HIV cases in 2007, 60.7% were male and 39.3% were female
• 26.5% out of 83 male patients self-identified as MSM (2007)
• MSM considered a high risk group (UNGASS country report, 2008)
Societal Context

• Socially and religiously conservative
• Influence of Faith-Based Organizations
• Societal homophobia
• Buggery laws
Buggery Laws in English-Speaking Caribbean

- Antigua and Barbuda
- Barbados
- Belize
- Dominica
- Grenada
- Guyana

- Jamaica
- St. Kitts & Nevis
- St. Lucia
- St. Vincent & Grenadines
- Trinidad and Tobago.
Buggery Laws

"Any person who commits buggery is guilty of an offence and is liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for life."

Sexual Offences Act 1992, Barbados
“What are we going to do about reaching men who have sex with men when we have laws against their sexual activity in most Caribbean countries?”

Dr David Estwick, Barbadian health minister, Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV and AIDS, 2008
“I can assure you that UNAIDS will resolutely oppose discrimination against men who have sex with men, or draft laws whose purpose is to fan hatred, such as that in Uganda. Let us be clear, criminalizing homosexuality is an attack on the entire AIDS response. It violates the human rights principles on which UNAIDS, and indeed the United Nations, was founded.”

Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director
## Study Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews and Focus Groups</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one interviews with HIV prevention and service providers</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>One-on-one interviews with gay men</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups (2) with gay men</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
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Two Groups of Gay Men

- “Flamboyant” “ghetto” gays
- Discreet “bougies” or “posh” gays
“I will never flag and say that I am g-a-y, that is between me, myself and God…there’s no need for me to come forward and say that. Who suspects, who feels so that’s fine, who knows so that’s fine, but as you say you are [gay] there comes a reaction…I don’t think that I am in the closet but I’m still careful who I say and what I say.”

Gay man, interview
Gay Life

• Limited opportunities to openly socialize as gay
• Private Parties
• Internet Use
• Contact with other gay men in the Caribbean and internationally
Gay Life

“There’s nothing much other than do a party…probably go hang out, talk foolishness, watch a movie. Out of the party setting, that’s it. Just go by a friend, hang, watch a movie, have a couple of drinks and that’s it.”
HIV Risk

- Relatively high HIV knowledge
- Limited negotiation skills and condom use
- Low self-esteem
- Sex in exchange
- Poor health-seeking behaviors
- Mistrust of confidentiality in the health system
- Stigma and discrimination
HIV Risk

“Because if you have low self esteem and you come into my life and I see you as the person who loves me...if you say honey we are not using condoms tonight because I love you, that is what I want.”

Gay man, interview
Stigma

“The gay Barbadian is not in fear of his life as, say, maybe a gay Jamaican is. They maybe laughed at, stared at, but we don’t really have, I can’t tell you the last time we got a report that somebody has been actually physically abused or threatened because of their status. It will be more malicious, with people being offensive – and that is for those gay men who are obviously gay…are screaming they’re gay. For those that look and are straight, life is, I don’t think they have to really bother about what society thinks because they fit the mold.”

Government staff
Stigma

“battybowys, battybowys”!
Stigma

• Christian faith-based organizations/Rastafarian movement
• Mistrust in confidentiality of health system
• Buggery Laws
HIV Prevention

- UGLABB (United Gays and Lesbians of Barbados)
- Education, Outreach, Condom distribution, HIV testing
- Reach out to visible “ghetto gays”
Needs of Gay Men

“To be able to walk the road peaceful and comfortable without anyone calling you all types of names, without harassment.”

Gay man, interview
Needs of Gay Men

“...I would like there to be a better understanding within the gay community where everybody can be their brother’s keeper. You can look out for one another. Just to live good among themselves...”

Gay man, focus group
Needs of Gay Men

• Societal Needs (decriminalization of sodomy, human rights, legal protection)
• Individual Needs (self-growth, skills, jobs)
• Community Needs (unity, togetherness)
• Programmatic Needs (social spaces, comprehensive interventions)
Discussion

• Social spaces for gay men to be out
• Need for development of gay community
• In-country conversation about homosexuality and human rights
• Societal context of stigma
• Need for structural and comprehensive HIV prevention interventions
“Barbados has to come to the realisation that we are here to stay. We ain’t going nowhere. And at the end of the day some may pass away but there’s always going to be another set because we are here to stay. As a born Barbadian, as a taxpayer we should be given the full length of the law, regardless if we are gay.... Our sexual preferences have nothing to do with whether we are still human...We contribute to society.”

Gay man, focus group