

RETHINKING 'OVERSEAS-BORN' MEN AS QUEER MIGRANTS

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Background:

The category/categorisation of 'overseas-born' has become prominent – in HIV epidemiology, as well as in descriptions of HIV prevention uptake/access. However, there is a need to attend to what gets overlooked in the way this category is imagined, and in particular to bring attention to ways in which sexual identity features in experiences of migration.

Methods:

As part of in-depth interviews in two consecutive studies of people recently diagnosed with HIV conducted between 2018 and 2024, participants born outside Australia were asked about the ways in which sexual identity and/or HIV diagnosis featured in their experience of migration.

Results:

Twelve gay and/or queer men from Asia and South America were included in the analysis. Awareness of HIV was often quite limited; and understandings of HIV in Australia were sometimes informed by media reports about elimination of HIV transmission, which contributed to beliefs that the virus is no longer in circulation.

Similar to findings from the literature on queer migration, participants reported seeking to move to a place that could offer a better 'emotional fit' with their embodied selves (as gay-identifying men). The 'weak' ties of socio-sexual connections in cities in Australia, far from familial obligations/constraints, were highly valued. These gay/queer networks were also sources of information about where and how to access sexual health services.

Participants' accounts also provide insights into how these men negotiate sex in new environments, and how information about sexual practices and HIV prevention is transmitted through socio-social networks, and contributes to *expectations* about sex in destination countries or cities.

Conclusion:

By focusing on lived experience and embodied practices, the role of sexual identity and expression on the migration accounts of queer men becomes clear. Producers of messages about HIV elimination targets need to consider the multiple audiences of media, and need to undertake explanatory work to reduce misinterpretation.

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