

Partnerships key to preventing HIV transmission overseas

February 24 2015, by Carys Garland



Ms Crawford says advertising campaigns promoting safe sex are not always effective because some people don't always set out to minimise risk, but seek it.
Credit: vittorio sciosia

A WA health expert says establishing partnerships and networks between Australia and foreign countries should help prevent Australians from contracting HIV abroad.

Curtin University public health researcher Gemma Crawford says a

recent study explored the different experiences of Australian men who acquired HIV during overseas travel.

Ms Crawford says interviews with 14 men helped researchers establish four themes that described their motivations for travelling and engaging in risky behaviour.

The four themes include realising a fantasy, escaping and finding a new self or life, living a life less ordinary, and living local but still an outsider.

"Using grounded theory process, those were the key themes that emerged but like anything with qualitative research, it's not easy to put things in a box," Ms Crawford says.

The researchers conducted the study after finding the demographic of HIV-positive Australians had changed.

They hope the findings will help health professionals adopt different strategies to prevent disease transmission.

Ms Crawford says it would help if Australians worked with expats and HIV prevention workers in other countries because the federal government can only prevent HIV transmission in Australia.

"We need to have a much better understanding of how those men participate in social networks in those countries they're visiting."

Advertising campaigns not always effective

Ms Crawford says advertising campaigns promoting safe sex are not always effective because some people don't always set out to minimise risk, but seek it.

"We need to make sure the messages we give out as part of any travel campaigns understand risk and don't just focus on risk avoidance," she says.

"For some men, they are very comfortable with risk; they do jobs that are very risky so for them, risk is just part of everyday life so they don't tend to think about putting in place risk-prevention strategies.

"For other men, travel was about escape and that came through very strongly; escape from previous lives; marriages; previous relationships."

Ms Crawford says the study also found some [men](#) didn't realise the risk of having unprotected sex in a country like Thailand could be much higher than that of having [unprotected sex](#) in Australia.

"Those new experiences for them were so new and so exciting that all those ideas about what we might do in Australia about using condoms and getting tested just go out the window," she says.

Ms Crawford is conducting further research into using expats and long-term travellers' social networks to support local HIV prevention interventions in South-East Asia.

More information: "'Living a life less ordinary': exploring the experiences of Australian men who have acquired HIV overseas." *Sexual Health* 11(6) 547-555. [DOI: 10.1071/SH13155](https://doi.org/10.1071/SH13155)

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