



Bulgarian MSM – sexual behaviour. EMIS data.

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BACKGROUND

Bulgaria is a mid-sized South-Eastern European country. The HIV epidemic is concentrated mainly among IDUs. The total number of HIV registered cases is 1333 (up to the end of April 2011). Around ¾ of them are male but only 10-11% are reported as MSM.

OBJECTIVES

To compare respondents' HIV-related behaviour in different Bulgarian districts.

METHODS

The data used is taken from the European MSM internet survey (EMIS), conducted from June to August 2010. Bulgarian data set was split into 6 subsets, depending on the size of the districts and the number of the respondents in each district, as follows: the district of Sofia, the district of Varna, the district of Plovdiv, the district of Burgas, the rest of the country (24 districts) and no responses (unknown district). Chi-square analyses and non-parametric tests were used to assess the relation between the variables, related to district and men's behaviour.

RESULTS

A total of 1036 men, living in Bulgaria, participated in the survey. Almost half of them (46.8%) live in the capital – the city of Sofia, 10.2% live in Varna, 7.5% – in Plovdiv, 4.3% – in Burgas and 22% in the other 24 districts of the country. No responses are 9.1% (Map 1).

Targeted HIV prevention activities among MSM are implemented through the Program "Prevention and control of HIV/AIDS", financed by Global Fund Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna since the end of 2009 and in Burgas and Blagoevgrad since July 2010.

One third of the participants (30.1%) reported a steady relationship with one male partner. The participants from Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas (the largest for the number of the respondents) reported having one steady male partner significantly more frequently than the participants from the other districts ($p < 0.05$). The mean rank of the length of the relationship among all participants in Bulgaria is 4.13 and also significantly varies among the districts – the longest mean relationship is reported by the respondents from Burgas and the shortest – from Varna, $p < 0.05$ (Fig. 1).

More than 4/5 of the participants (81.9%) reported having had (any kind of) sex with male partner within the last 6 months. More than two thirds (69.6%) of the participants reported having anal sex with a man during the last 6 months. Almost a half of the participants (45.9%) reported having had unprotected anal intercourse the last time they had anal sex with man. There was no significant difference between the answers of the respondents from the different districts.

Almost 2/3 of the participants (64.3%) reported having sex with their steady partner during the last 12 months. Respondents living in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas significantly more frequently reported having sex with their steady partner than the participants from the rest of the country ($p < 0.05$). The reported number (mean rank) of steady anal sex partners within the last 12 months was 2.96 and did not differ significantly among the districts.

Two thirds of the respondents (66.7%) have had sex with a non-steady male partner during the last year without significant differences among the districts.

The reported number (mean rank) of non-steady partners was 5.84 and significantly varied among the districts: 4.68 in Plovdiv and 4.61 in the rest 24 districts vs. 6.60 in Sofia, $p < 0.0001$.

The reported number (mean rank) of non-steady anal sex partners was 6.28 and significantly varied among the regions, $p < 0.001$: the smallest mean rank is detected in Plovdiv and the rest 24 districts (4.84-4.95) compared to the respondents from Sofia, Varna and Burgas (6-7).

The overall proportion of the respondents who reported an anal intercourse with a non-steady partner in the last 12 months was 82.5% and was significantly lower in Plovdiv – 66% as compared to the other districts – 78.9-88.3% ($p < 0.05$).

The proportion of the respondents who reported a passive anal intercourse the last time they had sex with a non-steady partner was 33.9%; those who had an active intercourse were 23.4% and every tenth (10.1%) has had both passive and active intercourse. These proportions varied among the districts: the participants from Sofia and the other 24 districts have had passive intercourse more often than the participants from the other 3 districts (43.7-50% vs. 26.3-39.4%). The respondents from Varna and Burgas reported having active intercourse more often than the respondents from the other districts (36.8-36.3% vs. 18.2-29.5%); the men from Plovdiv more often reported having both types of intercourse (33.3% vs. 10-15.8%), $p < 0.05$ (Fig. 2).

Only 12.4% of the respondents have told everybody they were attracted to men; a bit more (17.4%) have told that to more than a half of their family members, friends and acquaintances; 12.6% – to less than a half; the biggest share of the respondents (36.2%) have admitted to just few persons; 25% have never revealed their sexual preferences. The proportion of people who knew that the respondent's are sexually attracted to men varies among the districts. It was significantly higher in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas than in the other 24 districts studied, $p < 0.001$ (Fig. 3).

CONCLUSIONS

A lot of cultural and ethnical diversities exist among the Bulgarian MSM population. MSM in the three biggest districts (Sofia, Varna and Plovdiv) are not afraid to disclose their homo- or bisexuality and also have sex with a large number of non-steady partners and consequently are at greater risk of HIV infection. On the other hand, men from smaller towns and villages have less partners but experience more often an receptive intercourse which also leads to an increased risk of HIV. Prevention activities among MSM have been implemented in the largest four districts and one more. Our results show that the prevention should be expanded to the smaller towns and should be specified according to the different behavioural patterns of the men.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EMIS project was co-funded by the European Commission and the associated partners GTZ, RKI, CEEISCAT, CRRPS-Regione Veneto, Maastricht University, Sigma Research. This document has been produced with support of the EMIS project. The contents of the document are the sole responsibility of the authors and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union or of the EMIS Steering Group.

The study in Bulgaria was promoted by NCIPD, Program "Prevention and control of HIV/AIDS" (financed by GFATM), four NGOs subrecipients of the Program: Queer Bulgaria Foundation, Avis Vita Foundation, Dose of Love Association, SOS Families in Risk Foundation and four web-sites: momcheto.com, gay.bg, g-spot.bg, hiv.g-spot.bg

Map 1. Distribution of the participants

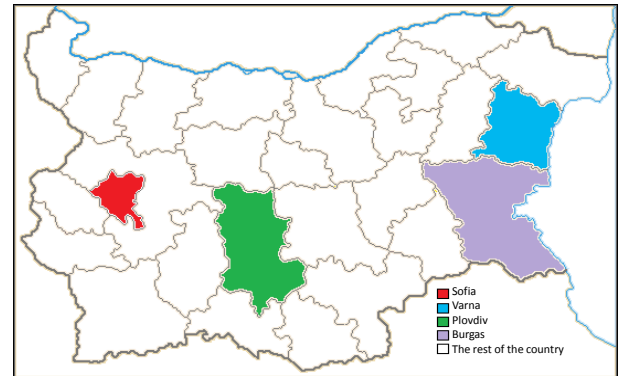


Fig. 1. Sexual pattern for steady partner

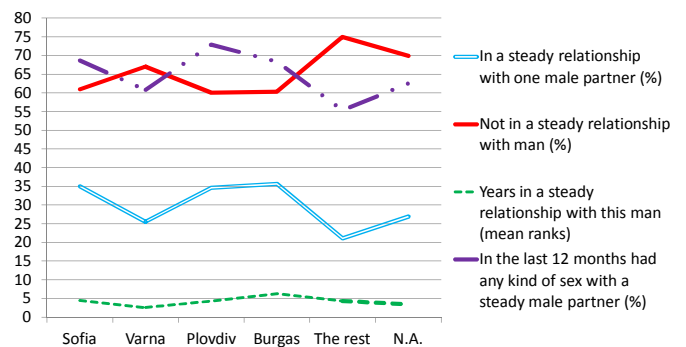


Fig. 2. Sexual pattern for non-steady partner

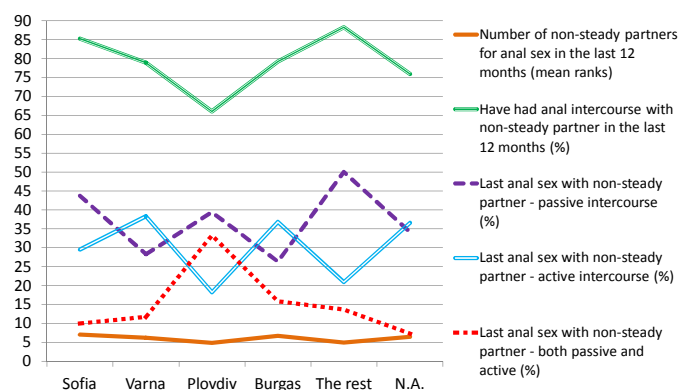


Fig. 3. What proportion of people who know you, know that you are attracted to men

