



# Behaviorally bisexual men – an underestimated bridge population in HIV transmission in Latvia

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## BACKGROUND

According to the European MSM Internet Survey's (EMIS) data, the prevalence of HIV among MSM who have ever been tested (n=347) is 7.8% in Latvia, which may mark a concentrated epidemic in this at-risk group. It is also known that in the most homonegative societies the percentage of MSM who report

bisexual behavior is higher. No study has addressed these issues in the Baltic region, therefore we will try to highlight the role of behaviorally bisexual men in the spread of HIV infection into the general population.

## METHODS

- We analyzed 708 valid questionnaires collected in Latvia through EMIS (2010).
- 136 MSM (19.5%) **have had sex with women in the past 12 months** and were identified as **behaviorally bisexual MSM (BBMSM)**.
- We characterized behaviorally bisexual MSM (BBMSM) and

- compared them to behaviorally homosexual MSM (BHMSM) in regards to identity and self-perception, behavior, and HIV-testing.
- We calculated proportions and compared them using Pearson's chi-squared test.
- A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

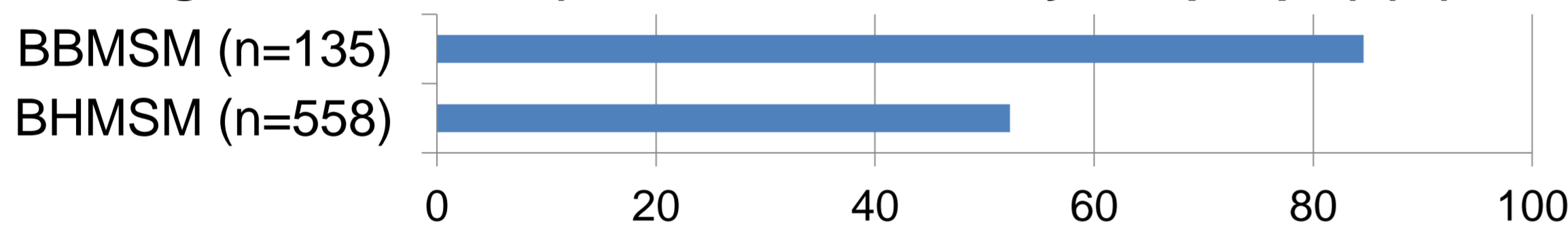
## RESULTS

- The majority of BBMSM (61%) identified themselves as bisexual; still 17% of BBMSM called themselves gay/homosexual but 3% self-identified as straight/heterosexual.
- Groups didn't significantly differ in regards to sociodemographic factors.
- A significantly higher proportion of BBMSM are not 'out' to almost anyone (p<0.001)

- BBMSM more often reported selling sex in last 12 months compared to BHMSM (13% vs. 6%, p=0.016), but no difference was found regarding buying sex.
- No significant difference was found in sexual practices, prevalence of high-risk sexual behavior (defined as unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) with any male partners of unknown or discordant HIV serostatus in the last 12 months) or number of male sex partners.

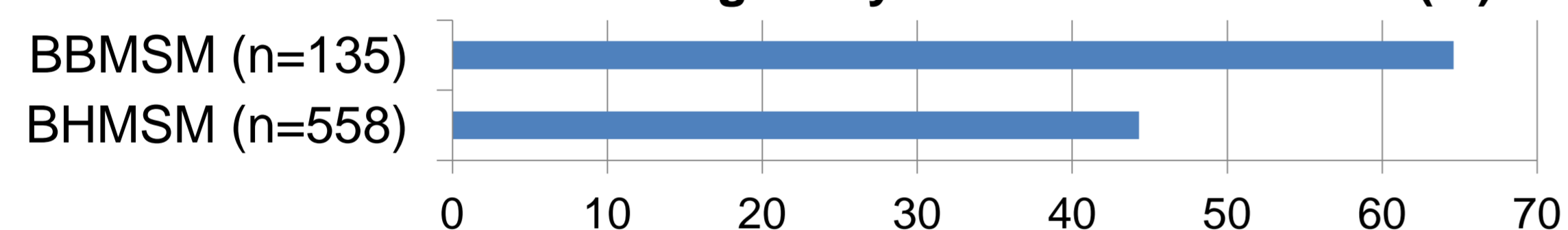
- Overall the proportion of MSM never tested for HIV is high in Latvia (50%). This proportion was even higher in BBMSM compared to homosexual MSM (p=0.037)

### ■ Being 'in the closet' (out to no-one or only few people) (%)

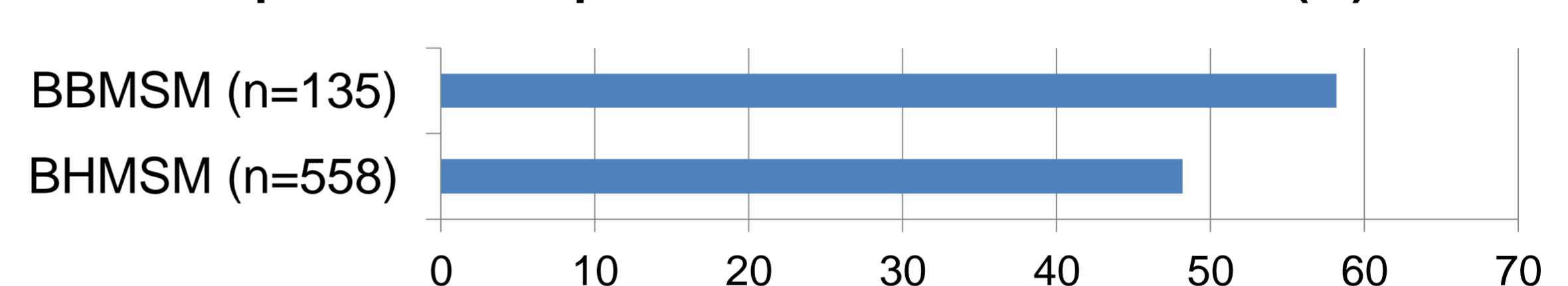


- Comparing the level of the mean internalized homonegativity score, it was higher among BBMSM (p=0.001)

### ■ Mean internalized homonegativity score above median (%)



### ■ Proportion of respondents never tested for HIV (%)



## CONCLUSIONS

- This study indicates higher vulnerability of BBMSM to HIV due to lower HIV testing rates and involvement in commercial sex.
- The reticence of BBMSM may play an important role in turning them into an underestimated bridge group for HIV transmission.
- An important prerequisite for effective HIV prevention should include removing stigma from non-heterosexual practices and challenging heteronormativity.

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### Republic of Latvia:

- One of the Baltic States, Northern Europe
- Borders: Estonia, Lithuania, Belarus, Russia
- Capital: Riga
- Declared independence from the USSR: 4 May 1990
- Member of the EU: since 2004
- Territory: 64,559 km<sup>2</sup>
- Population: 2,074,605 (2011)
- Language: Latvian



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