

TRAVEL-ASSOCIATED DISEASE

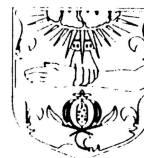
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5 Sexual behaviour of sex-tourists: conclusions from a study of the social and psychological characteristics of German sex-tourists

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Travellers, it appears, take more risks in general, are more open for new contacts and behave both more liberally and more promiscuously on vacation than at home. Therefore, it was natural to take as a background for a study the premise that international sex-tourism could act as a catalyst for the spread of HIV and AIDS. One indicator for this hypothesis is the explosive increase in HIV infection among prostitutes in Thailand. This chapter presents some results of a research project on HIV/AIDS and sex-tourism which the authors have carried out since 1991 with the support of the Federal German Ministry of Health.

The main objectives of the study were to:

- gather data about the social and psychological characteristics of German sex-tourists;
- estimate the epidemiological significance of sex-tourism for the spread of HIV/AIDS; and
- develop recommendations for prevention in this area.

Social and psychological background of German sex-tourists

As an operational definition for the purposes of this study, the term 'sex-tourist' is used to describe a person travelling from an industrialised country to a third world country, who stays there for a limited period (mainly for vacational purposes, but also for business or to attend conferences), and who pays for sex with local women either with money or in kind.

Together with a high 'normal' tourist affinity for the destination country, fundamental to the phenomenon of sex-tourism are:

- a large prevailing difference in the standard of living between the countries of origin and destination (tantamount to exploitation of the third world by the first);
- exploitation of women by men based on this difference; and
- an ever-increasing risk of the spread of HIV and AIDS via the sex-tourist.

The survey

Trained interviewers carried out 766 interviews with male sex-tourists in two phases: December 1991 to March 1992 and December 1992 to April 1993. The interviews, which were carried out face-to-face (by male and female interviewers) using a standard questionnaire, centred on the themes 'vacation, love and sexuality'. Approximately 250 items of information about each interviewee were gathered anonymously about:

- behaviour and motives on vacation;
- self description and personality characteristics;
- attitudes to love and partnership;
- sexuality on vacation and at home;
- attitudes to the risks of infection and use of condoms; and
- general socio-demographic data.

Most of the men approached were quite open, and about half of them were prepared to take part in the interviews. As sex-tourists form a so-called 'hidden population', whose characteristics are by and large unknown, it was not possible to achieve a representative sample. However, to achieve as near as possible 'ecological variety', the interviews were done in different socio-economic settings, locations and destination countries.

Of the 766 men interviewed (661 heterosexual, 105 homosexual), there were:

- 236 interviews in the Dominican Republic;
- 204 in Thailand;
- 136 in Kenya;
- 112 in Brazil; and
- 78 in the Philippines.

These countries are — or, in the case of the Dominican Republic, becoming increasingly — important destinations for both German and international sex-tourism. Although not considered here,

it should be noted that the eastern European countries are also now becoming of increasing importance in this respect.

In addition to the standardised questionnaires, descriptions of the locally different prostitution scenes were made by the researchers and some in-depth interviews carried out. Further, there was an attempt to shed light on the supposedly new phenomenon of female sex-tourism, in that first interviews were held with women who had paid for sex with local men whilst on vacation either with money or in kind.

Results of the survey

The sex-tourists were found to be 'quite normal' men aged 19–74 years. A comparison with the total population of the Federal Republic of Germany showed an above average percentage of 20–40 year olds among the heterosexual sex-tourists, whereas the percentage of 40–50 year olds was higher among the homosexual interviewees. The average age of the latter, at 45 years, was ten years older than that of the heterosexuals. A higher than average percentage of the heterosexual sex-tourists came from the less educated groups, whereas more of the homosexual sex-tourists came from the higher than average educated groups.

Marital status

The family situation of the interviewees compared with that of the overall male German population (shown in Fig. 1) provides a basis for the sex-tourist's motives. The percentages both of single and of

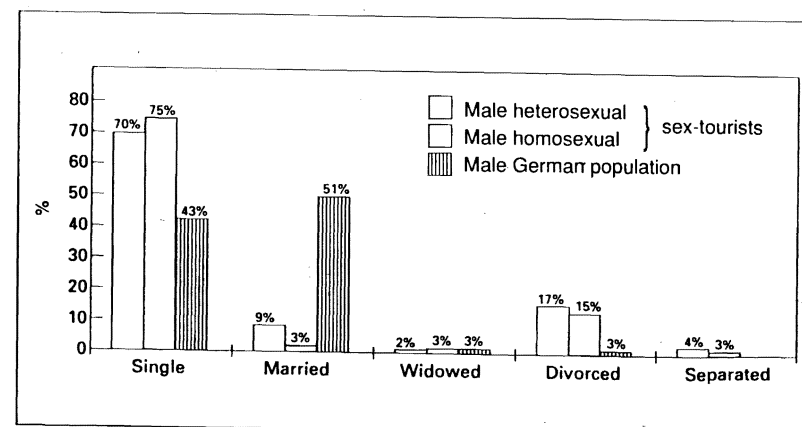


Fig 1. Marital status of the sex-tourists.

separated men were significantly higher than would be expected from the assumption that sex-tourists are 'average' men. In Germany, approximately 43% of men live alone; among the single sex-tourists it was 70–75%. In addition, only 9% of heterosexual sex-tourists were married (the corresponding figure for the male German population is 51%).

To estimate the epidemiological relevance of sex-tourism for the spread of HIV/AIDS, not only are data concerning the population of sex-tourists important but also information about their sexual activity, promiscuity and use of condoms. In interpreting the results reported below, it is important to bear in mind that sex-tourists were interviewed after they had been on vacation for a median of 14 days. Sex-tourists usually take much longer holidays than the normal German tourist. Their vacations, depending on the country visited, lasted an average of 37–54 days. The median durations were significantly shorter, but a percentage of sex-tourists are long-term travellers.

Sexual activity

Sex-tourists are much more sexually active on vacation than at home. The heterosexual men interviewed, who responded to this point in the survey, reported having had sexual intercourse with local women, on average, 12 times up to the time of the interview. A minority (12.5%; 79) reported having sexual intercourse only once up to that time, 38.2% (242) 2–5 times, 18.9% (120) 6–10 times, and 27.8% (178) 11 or more times prior to being interviewed.

The promiscuity of sex-tourists was surprising in comparison both with their usual sexual behaviour at home and with average German promiscuity.

Number of sex-partners

The average number of partners for the heterosexual tourist within the first 24 days of a typical 37-day vacation was stated at the interview to be four (median, two) (Table 1); for the homosexual interviewees, it was 30% higher at six (median, three) within the same period.

Use of condoms

There is apparently under usage of condoms by sex-tourists, except in the Dominican Republic (Table 2); 30% of the respondents elsewhere reported *never* having used a condom during their

Table 1. Number of sex-partners

No. of native-born sex-partners	Heterosexuals		Homosexuals	
	no.	%*	no.	%*
1	241	36.9	17	18.9
2–4	264	40.4	37	41.1
5 or more	145	22.2	36	40.0

*Percentage of those who responded to this part of the survey

Table 2. Comparison of condom usage: visitors to Dominican Republic *vs* other countries

Condom usage	Male heterosexuals	
	Dominican Republic (%)*	Excluding Dominican Republic (%)*
Never	9.9	30.9
Incidentally	14.7	24.1
Always	75.4	45.0
Total	n = 203	n = 353

*Percentage of those who responded to the survey

Table 3. Condom usage among homosexual men

Condom usage	Anal sex			
	Active		Passive	
	no.	%*	no.	%*
Never	7	17.5	5	18.5
Incidentally	6	15.0	0	
Always	27	67.5	22	81.5
No response	65	—	78	—

*Percentage who responded to the survey

vacation, and 45% were regular condom users. This level of condom use is drastically below that found in a study of clients of prostitutes in Germany, which, in line with the rising trend of previous years, revealed that almost 90% of sexual contacts were 'safe'.

Average condom use was significantly higher among the homosexual men (Table 3).

A comparison of cross-sectional data on condom usage among German sex-tourists reveals an unsatisfactory situation, but there is a positive development in that the percentage of German sex-tourists in Thailand regularly using condoms rose from 29% in 1990 to 50% in 1991–92 (Table 4). In addition, the percentage of those who never used condoms fell from 46% to 31%.

Table 4. Prevalence of condom usage in Thailand

Condom usage	1990		1991–2	
	no.	%*	no.	%*
Never	67	45.6	28	30.8
Incidentally	38	25.9	18	19.7
Always	42	28.6	45	49.5
No response	5	–	8	–

*Percentage who responded to the survey

Table 5. Estimation of prevalence of HIV infections

Assumed average HIV prevalence among local prostitutes (%)	Estimated no. new HIV infections*		
	German sex-tourists per year		
	100,000	200,000	300,000
1	19.3	38.5	57.8
5	96.3	192.5	288.8
10	192.5	384.9	577.5
15	288.6	577.2	865.8
20	384.6	796.2	1,153.9
30	576.5	1,152.9	1,729.4

*See text for parameters used

Magnitude of the problem

It is difficult to quantify the extent of the epidemiological problem resulting from international sex-tourism (Table 5). A point of reference was, however, obtained using a mathematical model

incorporating the following parameters:

- estimated average occurrence of sexual intercourse for the duration of the vacation;
- rate of condom use;
- promiscuity;
- estimated HIV prevalence among the prostitutes; and
- risk of infection per sexual intercourse with an infected person (1:500).

Assuming that, for example, 5% of all prostitutes in the destination countries are HIV-positive, for an estimated 200,000–300,000 German sex-tourists each year, between 200 and 300 new infections would be expected. This represents about 10% of all estimated new HIV infections per year in Germany. These infected men present a serious danger to women both in the destination countries and at home. It is not possible to estimate from these data the *actual* number of women who would be infected each year, because there are no data on their level of sexuality and/or promiscuity.

In the light of this situation, it is understandable that legal and other steps are being taken in Germany to repress sex-tourism. The success of further preventive programmes is dependent on our knowledge about the reason(s) for the low rates of condom use and how these can be influenced. There is empirical evidence for several possible explanations:

1. More than half the men questioned stayed several days with the same prostitute(s); in contrast a 30–60 minute cycle is usual in Germany.
2. The long contact time led to pair-like, but limited, relationships with the women, who according to the heterosexual men interviewed, were on average 13 years younger than their clients. The age difference between the homosexual sex-tourists and their sex-partners amounted to 24 years. Nineteen heterosexual and eight homosexual sex-tourists stated that they had sex with partners under 16 years old. The extent to which the 'relationship' took on the appearance of a partnership and the more private and less professional the prostitution-setting, the less the likelihood of condom usage.
3. One-fifth of the clients fell in love with a prostitute, and almost 30% of the sex-tourists wanted to return — and many do. At the same time, between 50% and 78% of them had travelled to other sex-tourist destinations in the previous five years, where the majority of them had also paid for sex with local women.

Predictors for condom usage

Using a multiple regression model, it was possible to identify four important factors which explain 50% of the variance of condom usage (Figure 2):

1. The frequency of sexual activity and whether the men had planned to have sex before starting their journey were negatively associated with the rate of condom usage.
2. Those who had explicitly planned their journey for sex made significantly less use of condoms. This also applies to the particularly active sex-tourists.
3. Less use of condoms was made by married men in comparison with single men.
4. An indicator for more frequent use of condoms was when they were supplied by the prostitutes.

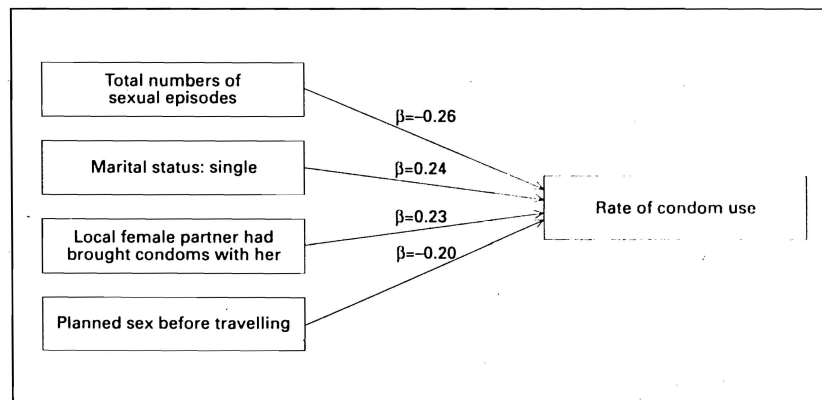


Figure 2. Predictors of condom usage. (β = beta values in regression analysis)

In the future, preventive campaigns should attempt to reach the men involved as well as the women. The success of such campaigns, however, will depend to a greater or lesser degree upon:

- how well the economic gap (itself an essential factor in sex-tourism) is closed;
- the extent to which the women affected are empowered; and
- the extent to which awareness by the men of the need for prevention and more responsible behaviour is promoted.

Hopefully, future national and multinational projects will contribute to this.