

Risk Behavior



Exploring the Cultural and Social Context of HIV Risk among Filipinos in San Francisco

Project Staff: Don Operario (PI), Victor Hall, Executive Director, Filipino Task Force on AIDS (consultant)

Project Description: Filipinos living in the U.S. constitute the largest number of reported AIDS cases among all Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs). Unique social, psychological, and cultural factors potentially underlie the concentration of AIDS cases among Filipinos in the U.S. relative to other API groups. For example, stigmas and attitudes surrounding ethnicity, acculturation, sexuality, and gender roles can influence HIV-risk behaviors among Filipinos. Investigation of these factors is vital for the development of theory and interventions that target this growing population.

This proposal describes a pilot study aiming to:

- Examine culturally-embedded stigmas and attitudes related to HIV-risk behavior among Filipinos in San Francisco.
- Identify social and psychological factors that can be targeted in future research and in interventions, particularly factors that either amplify or diminish risk for HIV infection among members of target population.

The study will be conducted in collaboration with the Filipino Task Force on AIDS (FTFA), a community-based organization that has been providing services to the San Francisco community since 1988.

Significance: The Filipino population in the US remains an overlooked and understudied group, despite recent trends indicating large growth in size. Filipinos tend to be aggregated within the API umbrella, thereby masking unique social, cultural, historical forces that influence Filipino health. The significant rate of HIV within the Filipino community, particularly in comparison with other API groups, suggests increased research must address social and behavioral factors that render this group vulnerable to HIV. Prevention efforts must begin immediately in order to curb further spread of HIV within this growing population.

In collaboration with the Filipino Task Force on AIDS, we are conducting in-depth focus groups with 3 Filipino sub-populations: Men who have sex with men, recent immigrants, and youth. We will convene a total of 6 focus groups (2 per sub-population).

Interesting Findings: Data collection is currently in progress. Preliminary findings suggest that sexuality, sexual behavior, and HIV are extremely stigmatized issues within the larger Filipino community. HIV knowledge among recent immigrants and non-MSM youth is fairly low. Many participants state that the Filipino community considers itself relatively insulated from HIV. Families tend not to discuss issues surrounding sexuality, and Catholicism underlies some of this tension. Participants stated that stereotypes about and prejudice toward Filipinos abounds in the larger San Francisco community, particularly regarding some men's attitudes toward (and preferences for) Filipino gay men and women. Because of cultural and historical forces, many Filipinos fulfill their groups' stereotype (e.g., gender and sexual roles) in the context of interracial relationships.

Strategies for new HIV prevention interventions are being discussed based on findings.