

*australian travellers, relationships & risk:  
exploring the **nexus***

*Gemma Crawford  
WA Centre for Health Promotion Research  
School of Public Health, Curtin University*

# overview

*“Why should you come for a holiday to Pattaya? Interesting question, but one with a very simple answer. If you answer ‘yes’ to any one of the following questions, you would most benefit from a trip to Pattaya...*

- 1. Are you recently divorced and at a loss what to do with the miniscule amount of money you were left after the divorce settlement?*
- 2. Have you just discovered your children are plotting to have you certified legally incompetent so they can get Power of Attorney over your assets?*
- 3. Have you won a lot of money and don't know how to spend it?*
- 4. Is the only female companionship currently available to you over 200 pounds & over 60, with a face like a sack of prunes & an attitude to match?*
- 5. Are you constantly being told you are too old, fat or ugly?*
- 6. Have the feminists and moralists controlling your country reduced your ego to zero and your self confidence to somewhere below that?”*

# setting the scene

- *The mass movement of people around the world is increasing, quickly and easily linking countries of high and low HIV prevalence*
- *Mobility is a driver of HIV epidemics*
- *Mobility is a risk factor or may exacerbate existing risk factors for HIV acquisition*
- *Mobility may also increase individual vulnerability for HIV transmission, influenced by:*
  - *motivation for mobility;*
  - *direction and destination of travel; and*
  - *the level of control that individuals have over their mobility*

# *“know your epidemic(s), know your response”*

- Australia has traditionally experienced a low prevalence, concentrated epidemic*
- Mobility contributing to changing epidemiological profile*
- An increased proportion of HIV infections acquired overseas*
- A cautionary message here for public health in Australia*

# 7th National Strategy



People from High Prevalence Countries & Their Partners

HIV diagnoses have been increasing among people from high HIV prevalence countries, including South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Women from these population groups have a higher risk of HIV than women in the general population.

Travellers & Mobile Workers

People who engage in unsafe behaviours while travelling, or who travel to or from high prevalence countries, are at higher risk of exposure to themselves or transmission to others. People from high prevalence countries in Australia temporarily, such as mobile workers, are emerging as significant in areas such as WA.

MOBILITY FACTORS

TRAVEL TO & FROM OZ



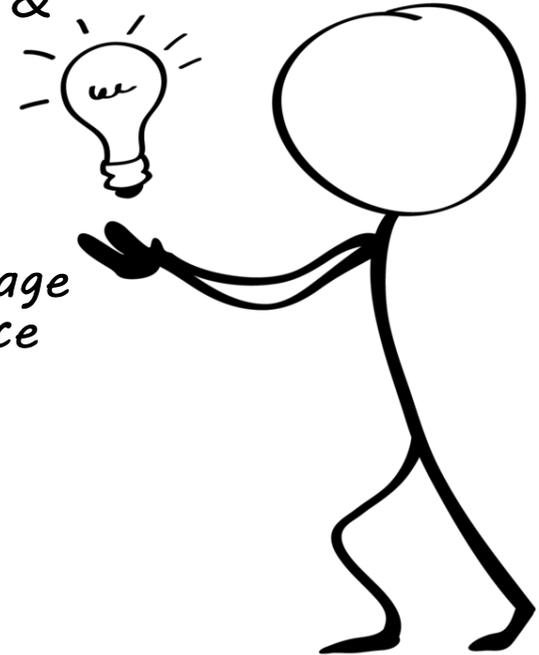
# *the other mobile population(s)*

- *Increasing HIV diagnoses amongst men travelling or migrating to high prevalence regions for work, leisure or lifestyle*
- *Vulnerability for overseas HIV acquisition is increased as:*
  - 1) HIV prevalence is higher in the destination country;*
  - 2) legal and policy approaches found in Australia to protect health may be lacking in host countries to mitigate health risks; and*
  - 3) risk behaviours may change or increase whilst overseas.*
- *Older travellers with healthcare needs*
- *Limited access to destination health system may equal ongoing reliance on the Australian health care system*

*our hunch...*

*(thinking over more than 5 years)*

- *Significance and role of social networks in mediating sexual risk behaviours may be influential*
- *Need a greater understanding of expatriate & traveller behaviour to determine how local relationships are formed, how individuals enter & are socialised into networks, & how these networks may affect sexual intentions & behaviours*
- *Traction had been difficult when trying to engage with companies about their Australian workforce*
- *Travel messages did not resonate with target group*



# *what are we doing?*

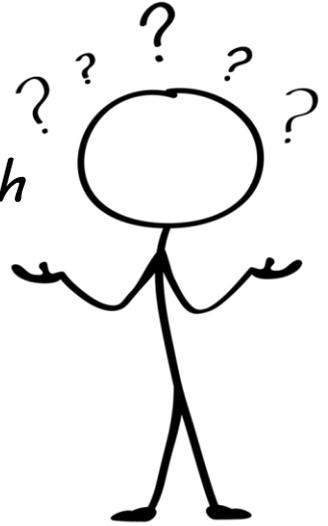
- *Our aim is to explore the interactions of male expatriates and long-term travellers within and between their environments*
- *Role of expatriates and longer term travellers as mentors and change agents*
- *Seeking a deeper understanding of culture, personal behaviours, socialisation process and pathways and any potential points for intervention to these networks*
- *Guide for further research, policy and practice*

# how are we doing it?

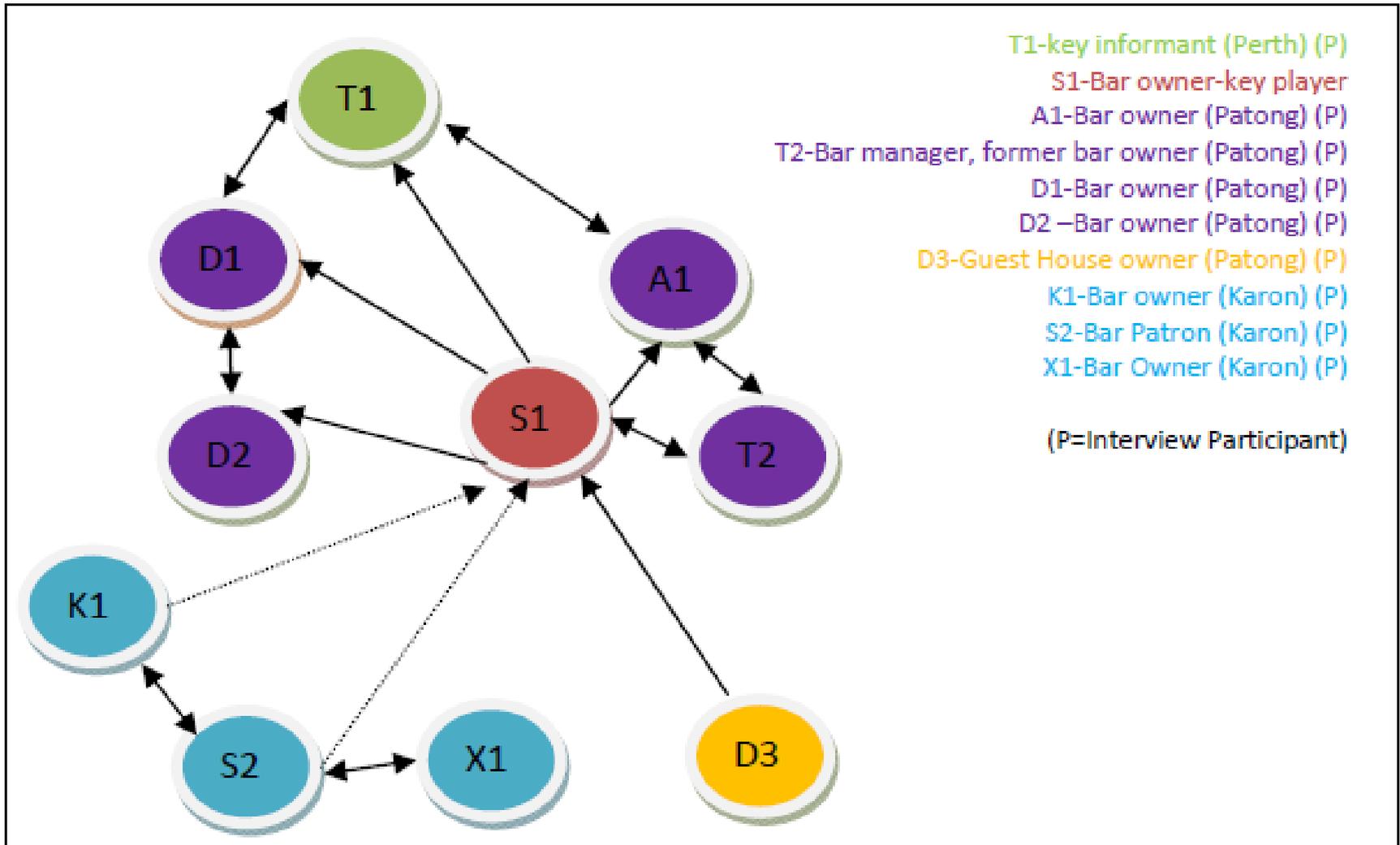
- *Symbolic Interactionism & Grounded Theory*
- *Interviews conducted in Australia & SE Asia*
- *Analysis of posts to online forums*
- *Purposive and theoretical sampling for interviews*
- *Location based audit in SE Asia*
- *Analysis of online forum threads*
- *Exploring development of self and self-identity, & transition process from Australian to Expatriate Australian & Insider which occur within and between the interactions of male expatriates & long-term travellers & their environment*

# what are we finding?

- *Consistency with findings from the earlier research*
- *Inconsistent knowledge - “play the risks”*
- *“Othering”*
- *Online forums provide both an opportunity to meet new people, but also to augment existing social relationships*
- *Insiders versus outsiders-strong set of norms around accepted behaviour*
- *Identifiable change agents within particular social networks*
- *Advice not about being social, but about good business*



# what are we finding?



# #connection

- *Downtime and socialising*
- *Sense of divide-*
  - *country of origin “It’s the British and the Germans -never trust the Germans” (Australians) “It’s the Aussies that are the problem-Germans as well” (British)*
  - *Financial -the ones that had money vs those that didn’t*
- *Size of the bar wasn’t the deciding factor in who to socialise with, rather it is how long you have been in Phuket*
- *“Big players” moved together*

# #relationship with country

- Running, escaping or leaving *“Australia is too overregulated-too many laws”, “In Australia, I get lonely-too hard to meet people and women”*
- Divorce, partners and relationships
- Being an Australian in Thailand-labels
- Extensive travel versus, quick change *“I travelled once to Phuket as a tourist...·within 6 months I was living in Thailand”*
- Fantasy vs reality - *“You can get in to whatever you want” and “women are just better, nicer”· “There is no true love...·the girls are almost always out to fleece you”*

# #behaviour

- Shorter term travellers are less likely to listen to advice & more likely to “get in to strife”
- Young guys - “Young pricks- they don’t listen and they don’t respect”
- Men don’t listen to messages before they go away - “they leave their brains behind”
- Clientele has changed over time- now there are a lot more Australians who “think their shit doesn’t stink”
- People need to know when coming to Thailand, “To keep their mouths shut”

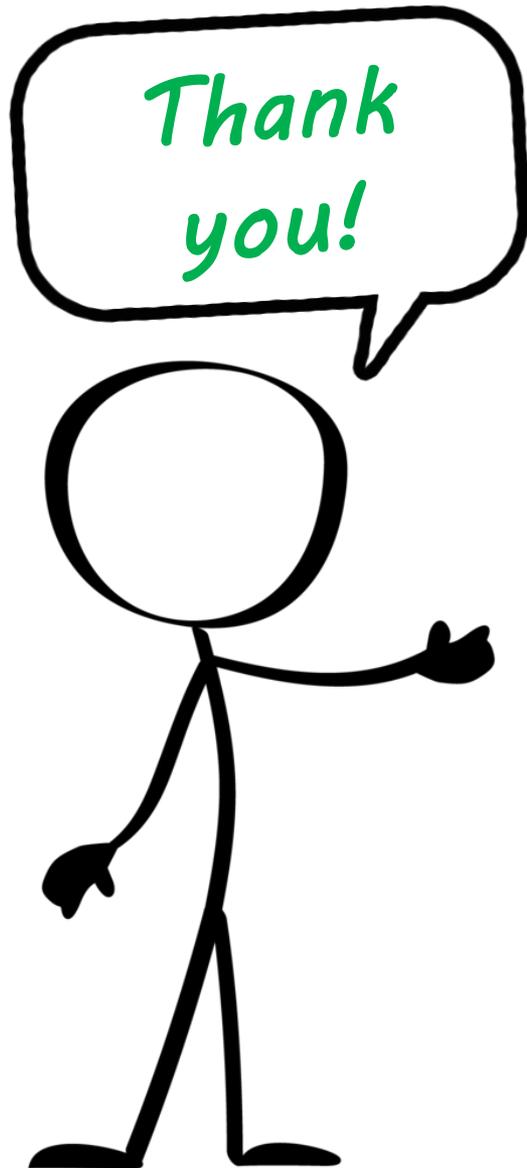
# #health & relationships

- *Sexual Health not a priority health issue*
- *Inconsistent knowledge around HIV - "you would probably know, cos they would be skinny and stuff"*
- *STI testing for staff*
- *Violence and crime - "getting ripped off"*
- *Risk and harm - "men are reasonable until they get tanked"*
- *Feelings toward health service access was positive*



# so what? where to from here?

- *Where is the natural community? Expatriate & long term male travelers have a unique culture*
- *A role for online strategies?*
- *Pre & post travel screening & advice*
- *Advocacy from Australia regarding access to and quality of HIV testing within neighbouring countries in the region*
- *Better understanding desire for travel may impact on the way health promotion strategies and messages are developed*
- *Cross-country & cross-cultural considerations-avoid reinforcing stigma or notions of stereotyped risk groups*
- *Intuition v evidence (or a mixture of both?)-population mobility will continue to change the characteristics of the HIV epidemic in Australia and beyond*



# acknowledgements

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“It doesn't matter whether you're fat, you're ugly, you've got spew hanging out of your mouth or whatever else, there's some lady here who will want to take care of you”

*Rachel O'Brien - Thu Mar 25 2010- AFP, describing the perceived experiences of male travelers with Thai women.*



*More info/any questions?*

*E: g.crawford@curtin.edu.au*

*P: 08 9266 4851*