

# Same-sex Sexual Behaviors among Male Migrants in a Context of Male

## “Marriage-squeeze”: Results from an Exploratory Survey in Urban Xi’an, China

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### **Background:**

From the late 1970s, paralleling the socio-economic development and the fertility decline, China’s population has experienced a fast increase in the sex ratio at birth (SRB) and excess female infant mortality, resulting in a growing female deficit and consequently in an increasing number of males who cannot get married some decades later (Das Gupta 1999; Guo et al. 2000). But in China, marriage is still almost universal and the idea that “everybody should get married” is widely prevalent (Xinqin Research Institute, 2008).

At the same time, while China is experiencing economic, social and demographic transitions, the increasing flows of rural to urban migrations –which are amounting to 0.221 billion people in 2010 (State Statistic Bureau, 2011)– not only accelerates the social transition, but also accentuates its complexity. Given this, the rural “marriage-squeezed” male bachelors in rural areas are entering the rural-urban migrant arrays due to the double pressure on marriage and economy. Then, under the background of sex imbalance followed by marriage squeeze and internal migration, two questions arise: How can those marriage-squeezed male migrants meet their sexual needs? Will there be an increase in the prevalence of same-sex sexual behaviors with which act as compensation among those marriage-squeezed male migrants?

### **Data and Methods:**

Therefore, the present study is designed to investigate the characteristics of same-sex sexual behaviors among migrant “marriage-squeezed” male bachelors, and the potential impact of the male marriage squeeze on same-sex sexual behaviors. Using the data from “the Survey on Reproductive Health and Family Living of Migrant Forced Male Bachelors in Urban Area” conducted in Xi’an City of Shaanxi Province during Dec. 2009-Jan. 2010, this study adopts the methods of crosstabs, one-way ANOVA, binary logistic the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to explore the same-sex sexual behaviors of unmarried male migrants in comparison to married ones.

### **Results and discussions**

In the present survey, the prevalence of same-sex sexual behaviors among unmarried male migrants is reaching 11.0%, which is twice as the level reported by married men who have migrated without their spouses: 5.1%, and thrice as that of men who have migrated with their spouses or partners: 3.8%. But in comparison to the previous survey conducted among rural residents in rural Anhui in 2008, where the prevalence of same-sex sexual behaviors reached 17.1% among unmarried men

and 8.9% among married men (Authors, 2011), these levels are lower. However, the prevalence of same-sex sexual behaviors among forced male bachelors tends to be higher than in some other population groups in China. For instance, Pan's study among male college students suggests that 4.2% of them had both same-sex sexual preference and same-sex sexual behaviors, about 4.0% only admitted same-sex sexual preference but no same-sex sexual contacts; 12.6% had only same-sex sexual contacts, and 4.3% had both same-sex sexual preference and same-sex sexual behaviors (Pan, 2000; 2004). Liu et al.'s study indicates even a lower prevalence of same-sex sexual behaviors, indicating that about 0.5% of urban married males, 2.3% of rural married males and 7.5% of male college students ever had same-sex sexual experiences (Liu et al., 2005).

However, it is worth mentioning that the situation of same-sex sexuality in China is somewhat special. Actually, since same-sex sexuality remains highly stigmatized in China's society, tolerance towards same-sex sexual behaviors is rather low (Liu, et al. 2005). As a consequence, most of the available data shows that the highest prevalence of same-sex sexual behaviors is observed among married people, indicating that most of the men with same-sex sexual behaviors actually get married but continue to practice their same-sex sexuality in a clandestine manner. This differs from the situation in Western societies, in which higher ratios of the men with same-sex sexual behaviors are observed among people who voluntarily remain being single (Chiang, 2009).

The comparison above suggests that the female deficit among adult population in China could to some extent be a factor favoring same-sex sexual behaviors among forced male bachelors in rural areas and among migrants in urban areas as well. This phenomenon was also found in other cultures and societies, e.g. there was an increase in male same-sex sexual behaviors due to sex imbalance occurred in northeast of Siberia, and an increase in same-sex sexual behaviors due to prostitution banning during Ming and Qing dynasties in China (Li, 1998).

However, as stated above, the prevalence of same-sex sexual behaviors among migrants is much lower than that observed among rural residents regardless of marital status (Authors, 2011). A possible explanation is that male migrants, as they live in urban areas where people are more open-minded, have access to more diverse channels for meeting their sexual needs than rural residents (Lin et al. 2006; Chen et al. 2008), and this should result in a lower frequency of same-sex sexual behaviors among migrants than rural residents.

The present study also evidences a significantly higher prevalence of same-sex sexual fantasy, same-sex sexual kiss and same-sex sexual preference among unmarried male migrants than other male migrants. This indicates that an increase in same-sex sexual behaviors among unmarried migrants is coupled with an increase in other components of same-sex sexual orientation such as same-sex sexual fantasy, same-sex sexual kiss, and same-sex sexual preference. Our results also indicate that unmarried male migrants and those who are married but migrated without their spouses have much more tolerant attitude towards same-sex sexual behaviors, in comparison to cohabitating male migrants. Moreover, regression results reveal the

impact of this attitude on same-sex sexual behaviors, suggesting that a more tolerant attitude is a strong determinant of having same-sex sexual behaviors, which is in accord with other more general existing studies on psychological behaviors (Penner, 1986).

Also, being single is apparently better accepted by the unmarried male migrants than by the other. The impact of this more accepted attitude towards singlehood on same-sex sexual behaviors is confirmed by the regression analysis, but mainly intermediated by marital status. This suggests that this more accepted attitude could be influenced by their singlehood. It is the involuntarily accepted attitude towards being single for life among those unmarried male migrants might be due to their desperation towards marriage rather than the voluntary selection of being single for life resulted from their sexual orientation.

According to our study, the frequency of condom use is significantly higher among unmarried migrants than among those who are married, and higher among the married migrants who migrated without their spouses than among those who migrated with their spouses. The average condom use frequency in the total sample is in between “2=seldom” and “3=occasionally”, indicating rather high risks for migrants’ health, regardless of marital status. The highest frequency of condom use is observed among unmarried migrants, lower among those who migrated without their spouse, and the lowest among those who migrated with their partners. This indicates a higher occurrence of risky sexual behaviors such as diverse sexual partners, buying sex, temporary sexual partners, same-sex sexual partners, bisexual behaviors among unmarried and separated married migrants than cohabitating married migrants (Lin et al., 2006). It also appears that for migrants who are cohabitating with a partner, condom use is more likely to be viewed as a measure for birth control, while for those who are unmarried and or who have migrated without their spouses, condom is truly adopted as a protective measure against AIDS and STDs.

The scores on knowledge of AIDS vary few between the unmarried and the married male migrants (including the separated and cohabitating married men), while the scores on knowledge of STDs are observed to be significantly lower among unmarried than married male migrants (including the separated and cohabitating married men). A possible explanation is that China’s government has been promoting information, education and communication (IEC) on AIDS among different groups including rural-urban migrants since 1990s, which might improve knowledge of AIDS among migrants regardless of marital status (Kaufman et al., 2002; Wang, 2004). The results from regression analysis further indicate that the knowledge of AIDS and STDs are both significant positive determinants of condom use frequency, in accordance with the existing researches (Wit et al., 2000; Matteson, 1997; Morin et al., 2005; Mansergh, Naorat & Jommaroeng, 2006; Zeng et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2010).

Whatever the marital status, having experienced same-sex sexual behaviors is significantly and positively correlated with condom use frequency, male migrants having experienced same-sex sexual behaviors using condoms more frequently. As stated above, however, the lower knowledge of AIDS and STDs among unmarried migrants and the low condom use frequency in the total samples both suggest a high

frequency of unprotected sexual behaviors and high risks in sexual behaviors among the unmarried male migrants and even the whole male migrants.

It is also observed that, whatever the age groups and marital status, male migrants with a longer migrating duration use condoms more frequently than the others. A possible explanation could be that a longer migration duration implies an increased exposure to risky sexual behaviors, which may result in a higher frequency of condom use for protecting themselves from risks. It could also be a consequence of the greater knowledge of the risks induced by STDs obtained from the IEC campaigns from the China's government toward rural-to-urban migrants.

### **Conclusions:**

Therefore, according to the results and discussions above, two conclusions have been drawn as following:

Firstly, as sex imbalance in the adult population makes a number of male migrants remaining involuntarily being single and in short of stable female sexual partners, our results indicate that this imbalance may actually impact sexual behaviors by increasing male same-sex sexual behaviors, as the prevalence of same-sex sexuality is significantly higher among unmarried male migrants.

Secondly, most unmarried male migrants have unprotected same-sex sexual behaviors, and that the lack of knowledge of AIDS and STDs appears to be the main determinant of these risky sexual behaviors.