

Introduction

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China's concentrated HIV epidemic is on the brink of becoming a generalized one in several regions of the country. Social factors relating to gender and gender inequality exacerbate the spread of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI) in China. A better understanding of the proximate social determinants of HIV related to gender is crucial for effectively curbing HIV and other STIs in China. Aspects of China's governance, including administrative procedures, the developing legal system, social institutions, and the public health infrastructure, are all instrumental in shaping strategies and responses to HIV. Although an international consensus suggests that women who are more economically and socially vulnerable are also at greater risk of HIV infection, few initiatives have focused on discrete areas where achievable and sustainable policy measures could be meaningfully linked to the public health response. Furthermore, there has been a dearth of sociological and public health assessments and responses to the specific health needs of China's emerging surplus men.

The expansion of sexually transmitted HIV in the People's Republic of China highlights the need for prevention and treatment focused on high risk sexual groups. The UNAIDS report released in January 2006 estimated that 49% of new 2005 HIV infections were from sexual transmission, and that over 40% of those living with HIV in China were infected through sex. Commercial sex worker HIV prevalence has jumped from 0.02% in 1996 to 0.93% in 2004 (MOH/UNAIDS/WHO 2006). A greater than 1% seroprevalence of HIV in some areas suggests that the epidemic may be generalized, moving beyond high risk groups to low risk individuals.

Moving beyond a purely biomedical approach to HIV/AIDS requires inter-disciplinary work that links together various groups involved in the

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