



# **COMPONENT FOUR**

## Embedding HIV services in a wider syndemic response

# Syndemic factors (1)

- HIV does not occur in isolation, but is often linked to social conditions and other health problems
- SYNDEMIC: a 'synergistic interaction of two or more coexistent diseases and resultant excess burden of disease'\*
- Seeing HIV as a component in a wider set of 'syndemic conditions' helps understand why some people have more difficulty changing towards safer sex behaviors than others, and points to the need to consider other pressing social and health problems of the people we are trying to reach rather than focus only on HIV.

\* Singer, Merrill, and Scott Clair. "Syndemics and public health: reconceptualizing disease in bio-social context." *Medical anthropology quarterly* (2003): 423-441.

# Syndemic factors (2)

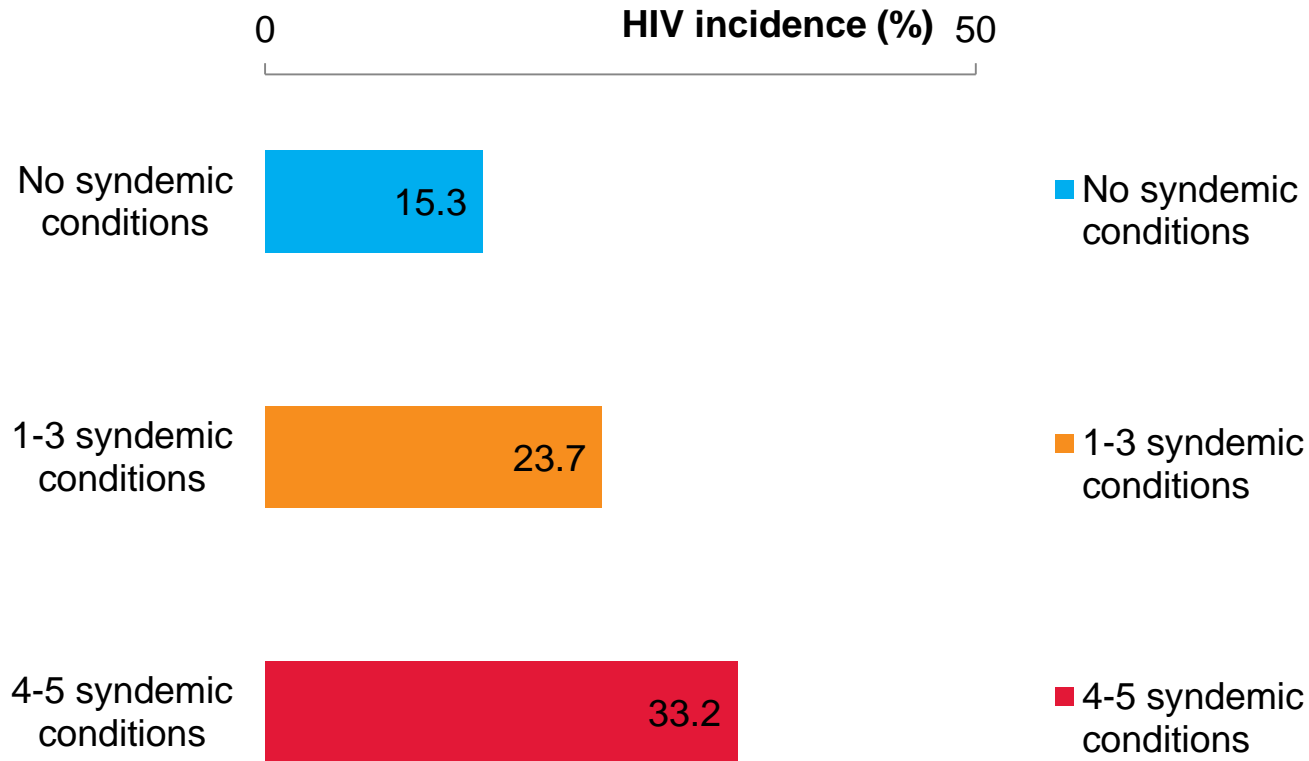
Key conditions that decrease the likelihood that a client uses condoms or accesses HIV counselling and testing services might include:

- Binge drinking / alcohol use or addiction
- Drug use (especially crystal meth or 'ice')
- Depression, severe loneliness or other mental health issues, often caused by alienation from family, friends and community
- Being sexually compulsive, i.e. 'addicted to sex'
- Having a history of sexual abuse
- Having a violent boyfriend/intimate partner
- Having considered suicide or having tried to commit suicide
- Having a history or current involvement in sex work
- **Poverty and homelessness**

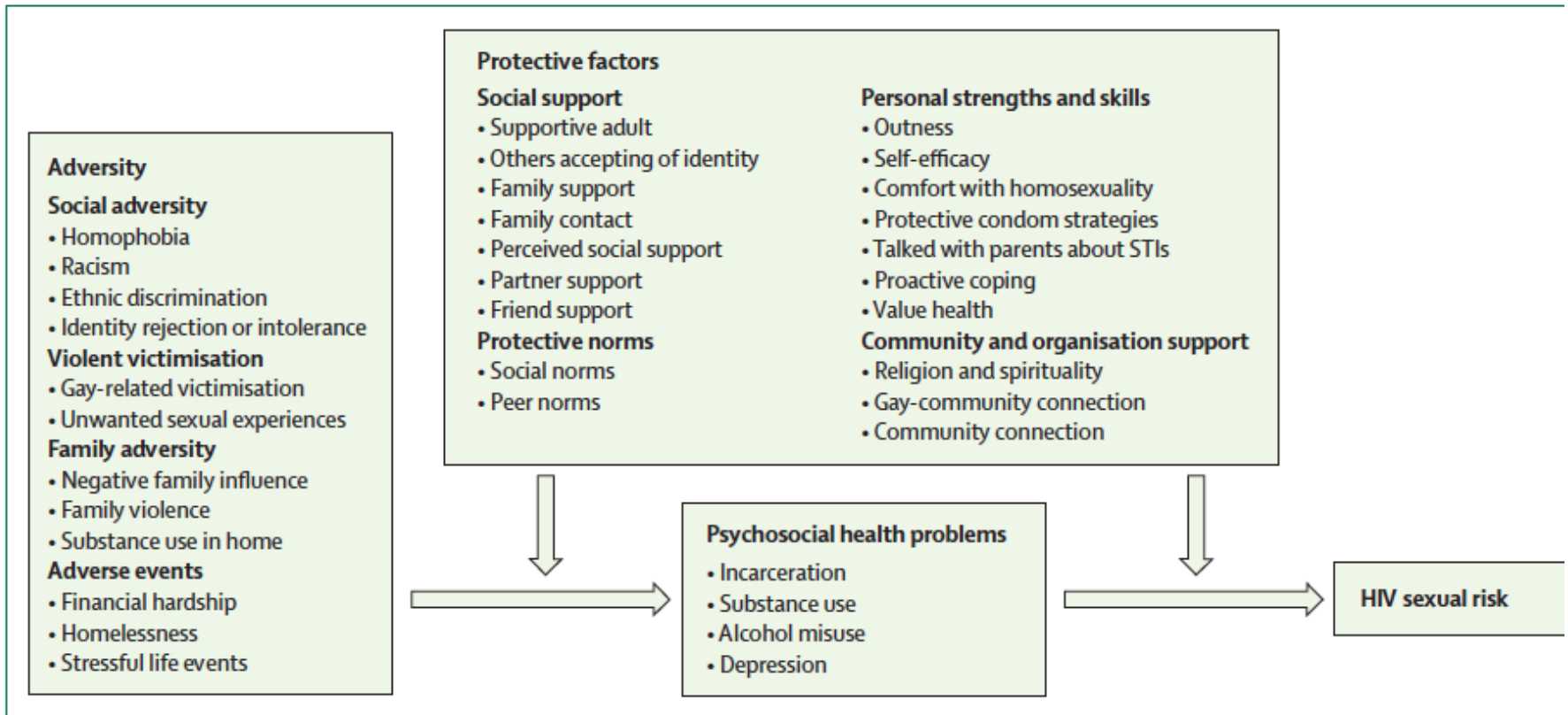
Santos, Glenn-Milo, et al. "Syndemic conditions associated with increased HIV risk in a global sample of men who have sex with men." *Sexually transmitted infections* 90.3 (2014) and T

Guadamuz et al, 2015

# Psychosocial health conditions are associated with increased HIV incidence in a cohort of 1,292 Bangkok-based MSM



# Factors associated with resilience and HIV risk in MSM



**Figure 1: Factors associated with resilience and HIV risk in men who have sex with men**

Together, these factors can contribute to a syndemic process. STIs=sexually transmitted infections.

Mayer, Kenneth H., et al. "Comprehensive clinical care for men who have sex with men: an integrated approach." *The Lancet* 380.9839 (2012): 378-387.

# Plenary group work: Syndemics

Using the fourth Checklist, list what you believe are the most important 'syndemic factors' that could be important for MSM. Think about alcohol/drug abuse, mental health problems incl. despair and suicidal thoughts/attempts, social isolation/lack of support, violence, involvement in sex work, poverty and unemployment, or others.

For which of these factors do services exist in your country/city? How can we mobilise them and link them to HIV services?