



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 28, 2010

Government Agency Spends Millions on Odd Studies

The National Institutes of Health, an agency of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, has reportedly spent \$1.4 million on a study, conducted by University of Illinois Professor Dr. Stevan Merrill Weine, involving a group of married Tajik migrant workers in Moscow who have engaged in sexual interactions with wives, girlfriends, and prostitutes.



According to the NIH website, “The study focuses on married men from Tajikistan working in Moscow and their risks for acquiring HIV through having sex with female sex workers and then transmitting the infection to their wives or female sexual partners.”

Touting itself as “the largest source of funding for medical research in the world,” the NIH has defended its recent endeavor as a means to address “the major global health problem of HIV prevention amongst married male labor migrants in Central Asia and the public health risk for an AIDS epidemic in Tajikistan.”

The abstract submitted by the NIH for the grant funding outlined a variety of aims:

1) To characterize how labor migration of married men under extreme conditions shapes masculine norms and schemas and HIV risk and preventive behaviors; 2) To characterize how women (wives, regular partners, sex workers) and their perceptions of HIV, femininity, and masculinity impact male migrants’ HIV risk and preventive behaviors; 3) To assess the current and potential roles of the organizations involved with married male migrants in responding to HIV and in mitigating masculine norms impacting men’s sexual behavior; 4) To build an empirically based model for preventing HIV amongst married male migrants that will help to develop programs and policies focused on heterosexual men and masculine norms.

Part of the research entails interviewing those involved in the study, as well as “observations” of the Tajik migrants and their female sexual partners.

Scheduled to conclude in July 2013, the study has already received \$479,394 in 2008, \$450,102 in 2009, and \$460,256 in 2010 from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a subdivision of the NIH.

The National Institutes of Health has faced harsh criticism for the study, however, for both the cost and the subject. Cybercast News Service, for example, questioned the NIH for funding such a study: “The Census Bureau says the median household income in the United States is \$52,000. How would you explain to the average American mom and dad — who make \$52,000 per year — that taxing them to pay for this grant was justified?”

The NIH responded by indicating, “The goal of such research is to understand the behaviors that



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contribute to increased health risks, as well as how as these behaviors can be changed in real-world settings."

They add, "In the case of HIV prevention, more than 20 million people worldwide have died from AIDS-related illnesses. Unsafe sex and substance abuse are contributing factors to contracting these diseases. Whether HIV research occurs in the United States or in an international setting, what we learn from these scientific studies often benefits Americans."

CNS rejected the NIH's defense of the study, however, by remarking on the actual statistics, which seem to underscore the study's lack of necessity. CNS points out that 2007 statistics show .3 percent of the population of Tajikistan have HIV/AIDS, compared to the .6 percent of the American population.

The Tajikistan study is not the first example of NIH wastefulness. In September 2009, Fox News reported on a number of "wasteful research studies" conducted by the NIH, including "how dragon boating can help cancer survivors," "how canoes can help cultural identity," and "how snorting cocaine creates anxiety."

In fact, the absurdity of the studies prompted Republican Representative Joe Barton, ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, to address a letter to the NIH director. The letter demanded that the NIH reveal its screening procedures and review criteria used to approve billions of dollars in stimulus grants.

Barton explained, "It's outrageous. It's beyond embarrassing in my book. I don't think there's enough oversight being done there."

In addition to those aforementioned, Barton cited a variety of studies that he considered to be suspect. In his research, he discovered a \$66,000 grant to study the relationship between sex and HIV in St. Petersburg, Russia, and a \$700,000 grant for a study examining the effects of taxes, trade, and politics on tobacco sales in Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and other stations in Southeast Asia.

In June 2009, Fox News reported that the NIH spent over \$400,000 to learn why men do not enjoy wearing condoms during sexual intercourse.

According to the researchers at NIH, however, the studies were necessary in order to acquire baseline data, which is often used to create programs that help people in need.

In truth, the NIH has funded a variety of valuable studies that have helped to acquire a better understanding of cancer, cholesterol control, and brain processes. It has also funded more than 130 Nobel Prize winners, and can boast studies that have led to the development of the MRI; however, it is difficult to assert the value of such an organization when it continues to spend money on such bizarre studies as the Tajik migrant workers and dragon boat racing.

David Williams, vice president for policy at Citizens Against Government Waste, responded to the discovery of such financial expenditures. "The government is so out of whack with what the priorities are that this actually makes [more] sense than the real problems facing the country."

To eliminate what is "out of whack," the only real answer is to look to the Constitution. There is nothing in the Constitution that allows for federal expenditures on health research outside the scope of preparing a military defense of the country's citizens. If Americans want such research to be done, they can either fund it at the state level (the closer the funding gets to the people, the more likely it is that it will be scrutinized and scrubbed of waste) or through increased tuition fees to colleges where such research is done.



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