

HIV “Not further specified”: the limitations in classifying and reporting heterosexual exposure to HIV

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Background

HIV is a notifiable disease in Victoria and all confirmed cases of HIV are reported to the Department of Health and Human Services using an enhanced surveillance form (figure 1). Three-quarters of HIV notifications in Victoria have male to male sex as the reported exposure, 3% injecting drug use and 17% heterosexual sex.

Heterosexual exposure to HIV in Victoria is further classified as:

- Person is from a high prevalence country
- Partner is
 - from a high prevalence country (HPC)
 - an injecting drug user
 - bisexual male
 - infected with HIV or
- **Not further specified (nfs)**

In Victoria at least 40% of HIV cases reporting heterosexual contact are **characterised as nfs**. An examination of these notification records was conducted to explore the characteristics of this under-reported group.

Methods

HIV notification records from 2006 to 2015 with reported heterosexual exposure were extracted from the Victorian HIV notification registry.

A descriptive analysis of characteristics of cases and their sexual partners was conducted.

High prevalence countries were those with a national HIV prevalence above 1% according to UNAIDS.

Sex only with person of OPPOSITE sex – complete section B →

Sex with a person from another country → specify country

B. Heterosexual sex with
Only complete this section if heterosexual sex was a potential exposure route to HIV infection

Bisexual male (women only)

Injecting drug user

Recipient of blood/tissue

Person with haemophilia/coagulation disorder

Person from another country → specify country

Date of the most recent sexual contact with this person*
 / /

Person with HIV infection whose exposure is other than those above → specify

Heterosexual contact – not further specified

Figure 1: Reporting of heterosexual exposure on the Victoria HIV notification form

Results

Between 2006 and 2015, 277 male and 218 female cases reported heterosexual contact; 50% and 32% were classified as nfs respectively (figure 2). Of the 207 nfs cases, 50% of both males and females were Australian born. One quarter of the Australian born reported a partner from a non-HPC compared to around 45% among the non-Australian born; the most commonly reported countries were Indonesia (21%), India (11%) and Vietnam (15%) (figure 3). Among non-Australian born, 43% of males and 34% of females reported overseas acquisition of HIV compared to 26% of males and 14% of females born in Australia (figure 4). One third of the non-Australian born classified as nfs were from the same country as their heterosexual partner; 18% from India and 16% from Indonesian.

Figure 2: Heterosexual notifications by classification & gender, 2006-2015

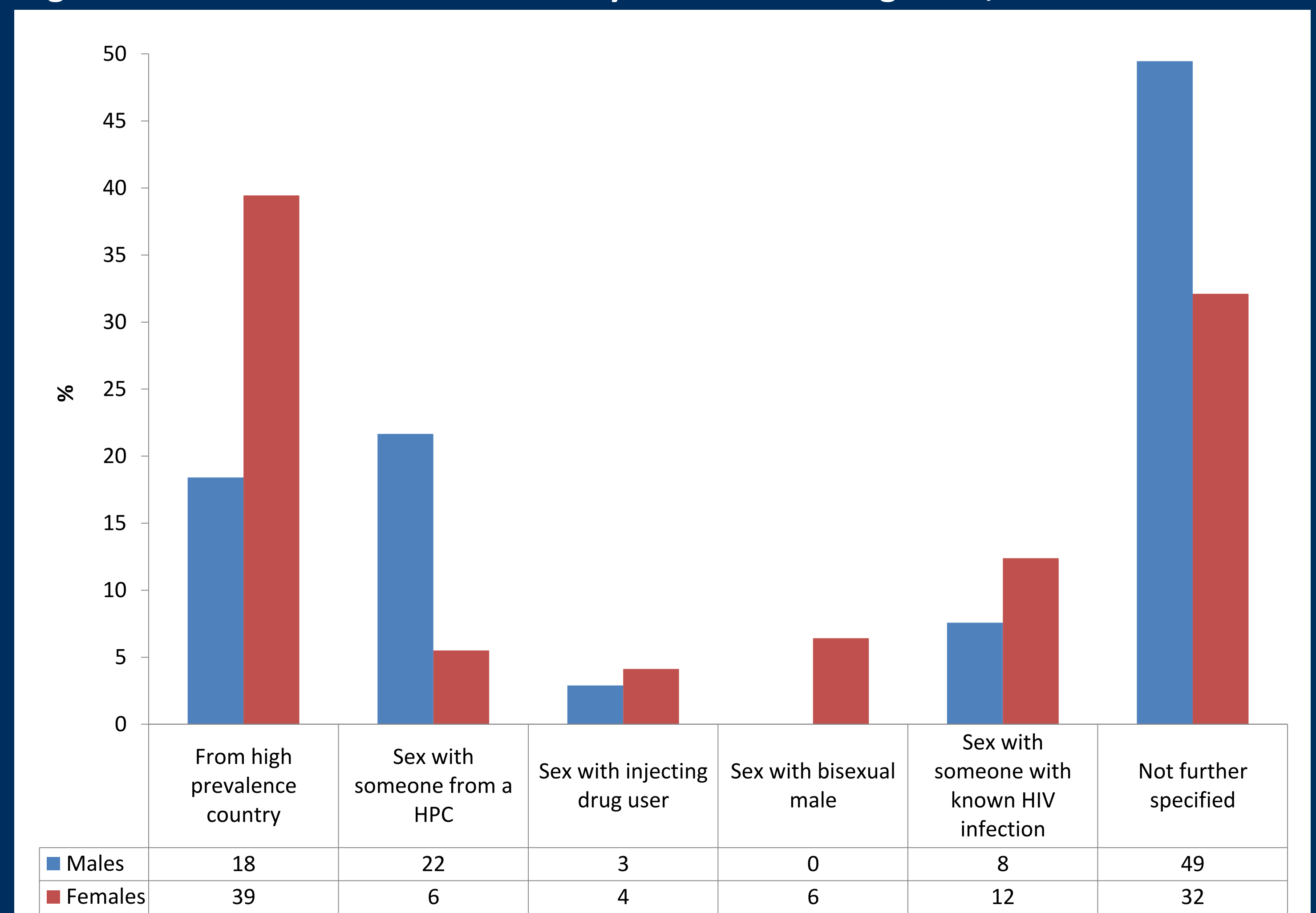


Figure 3: Place of birth of sexual partner by place of birth and gender

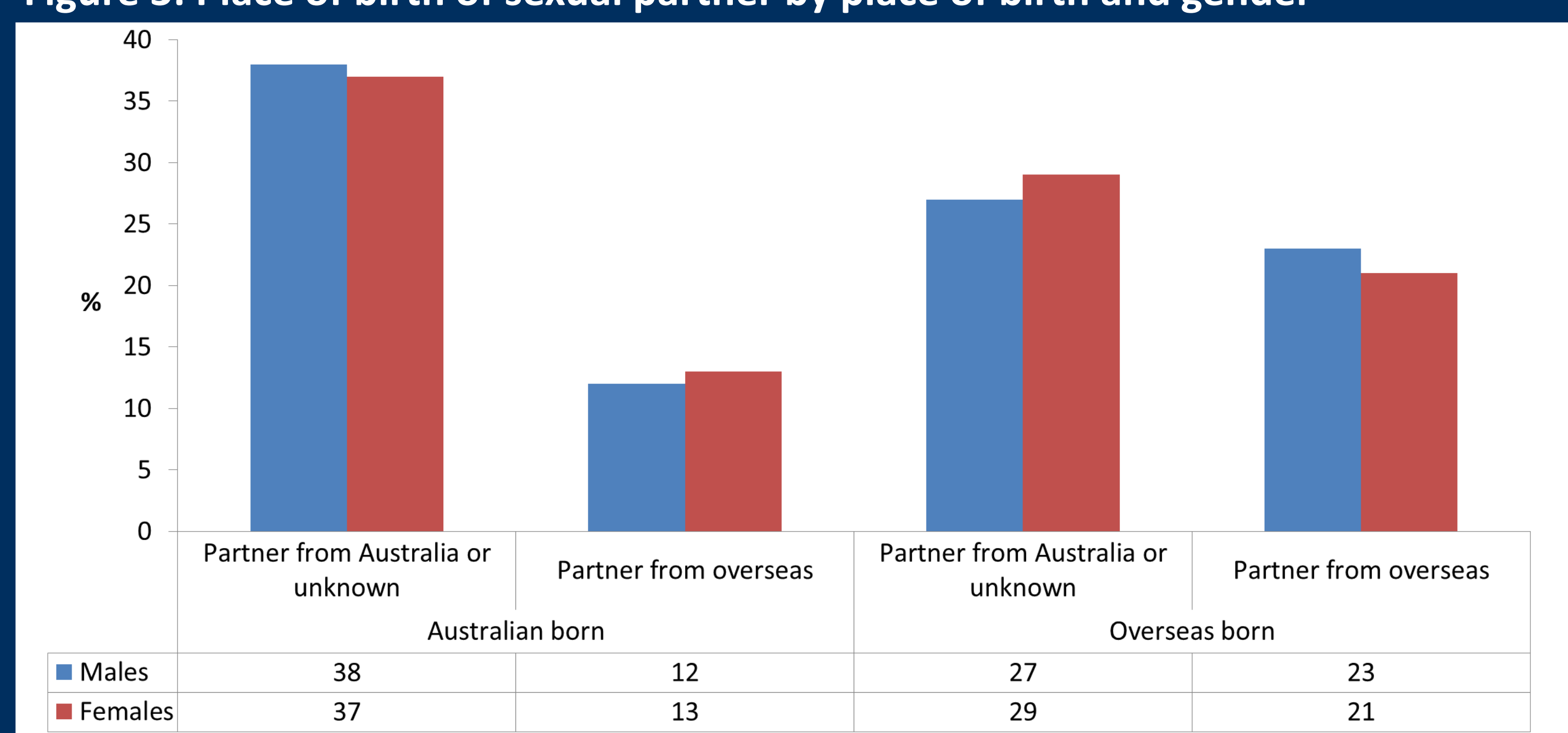
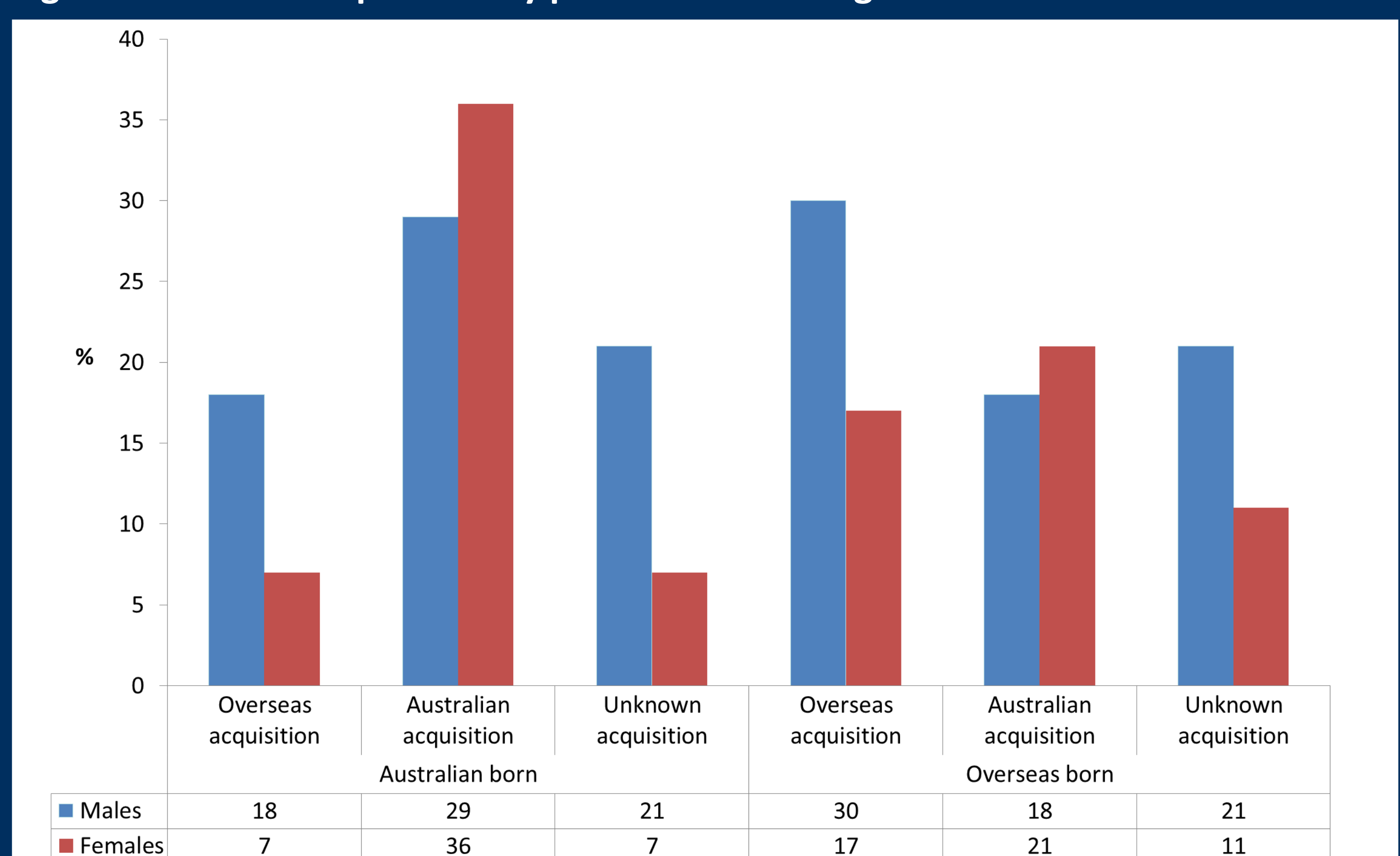


Figure 4: Place of acquisition by place of birth and gender



Conclusion

Classifying cases as nfs misses important epidemiological information regarding HIV acquisition among both Australian born and overseas born male and female heterosexuals. We recommend the standard classification and reporting of heterosexual exposures be revised to include reporting of heterosexual sex with overseas born individuals not from high prevalence countries.