

Romance, Sex, Relationships in Travel & Tourism

12 June



Expert Panel of
Social Scientists &
Tourism Scholars
Virtual Conference

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A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF SEX IN TOURISM USING THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

LIZA BERDYCHEVSKY, PHD

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, SPORT AND TOURISM

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

I ILLINOIS

SEX IN TOURISM

Sex and tourism – cozy bedfellows

Focus on commercial sex tourism

The links between sex and tourism cannot be reduced to commercial trade

Tourist experiences:

- **liberatory, contra-normative social settings**
- **anonymity, liminality/liminoidity, and situational disinhibition**
- **sexual exploration, transgression, and risk-taking**

Thus, the field needs a more flexible, comprehensive approach

EXISTING APPROACHES: SEX TOURISM

Often simply defined as sex for money in tourism contexts, but this obscures a lot of complexity

More nuanced approaches encompass multiple parameters:

- voluntary vs. coerced/forced participation**
- levels of commerciality involved in the sexual encounter**
- the role of sex as a purpose of travel**
- the positive vs. negative nature of the sexual encounter**
- the role of the tourism industry as a facilitator of sexual encounters**
- the nature of the financial exchange**
- the amount of time spent with a sex worker**
- the nature of the sexual encounter**
- whether sex-seeker, sex-provider, or both travel**

EXISTING APPROACHES: ROMANCE TOURISM

No consensus as to whether female tourists having sex with local men should be included and framed as sex tourists

Focus on the differences resists the inclusion of women in the ranks of sex tourists

Focus on the similarities problematizes such distinction as essentialist and uncritical

Sex and romance are not necessarily two distinct or dichotomous constructs

It is also crucial not to lose sight of non-commercial consensual sexual expression and pleasure among tourists

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL SEX IN TOURISM MODEL

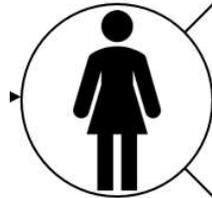
Encompasses commercial and non-commercial sexual behavior among tourists and tourists and locals

Analyzes a continuum of diverse positive and negative manifestations

The model serves as an umbrella lens for understanding:

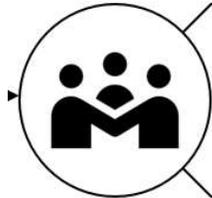
- **the light side:** safe, respectful, and mutually pleasurable sexual interaction between consenting adults
- **the dark side:** heinous sexual exploitation (e.g., child sex tourism, human trafficking)
- **50 shades of gray:** a plethora of other sexual encounters in tourism (e.g., risky sexual behaviors, non-forced prostitution, sexual harassment)

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL LEVELS IN SEX IN TOURISM MODEL



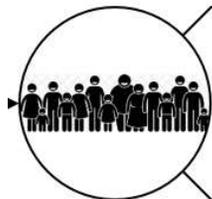
Individual social-ecological level

Includes knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, biological factors, and personal history affecting sexual behavior



Interpersonal social-ecological level

Includes the relationships between the sexual or romantic partners (tourists, locals) and their immediate social networks



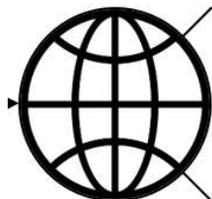
Community social-ecological level

Includes the resources and characteristics of the community receiving tourists that might affect or be affected by sex in tourism



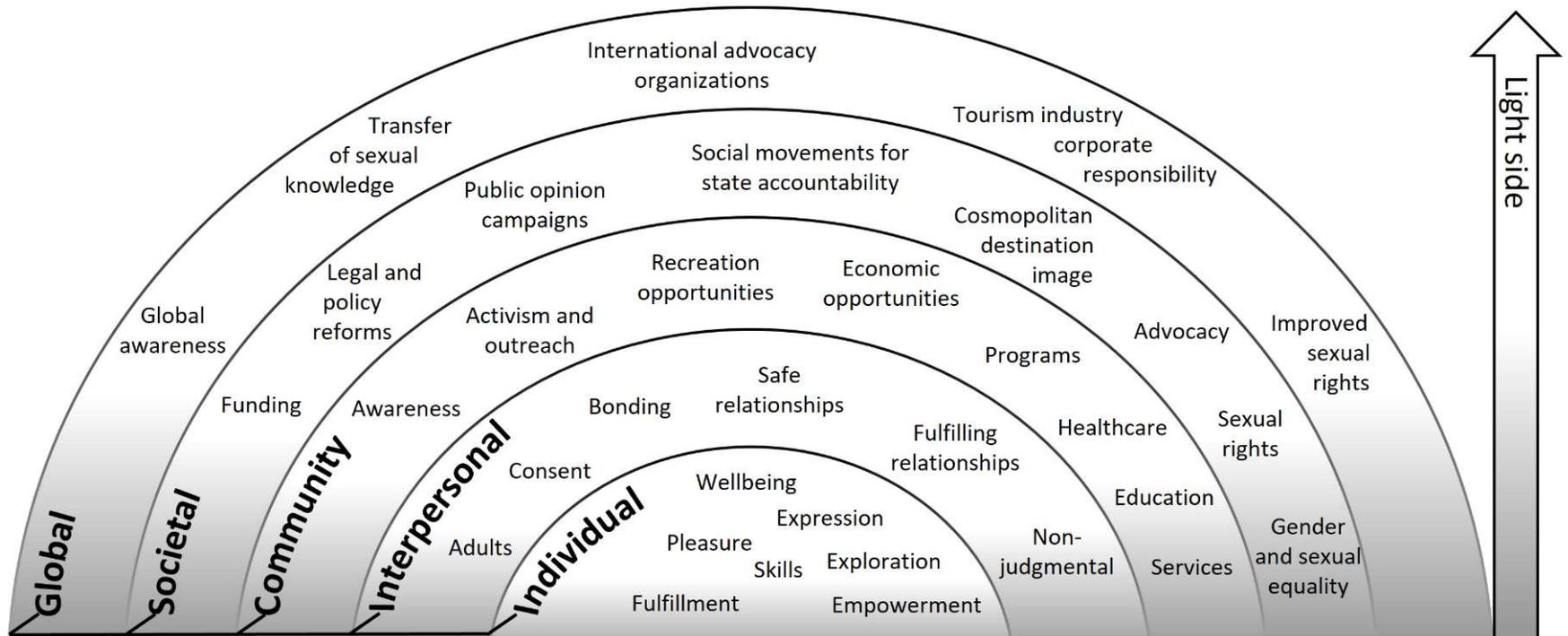
Societal/country social-ecological level

Includes destination image, sexual norms, sexual rights, and the ways they are reflected in laws, policies, and healthcare services

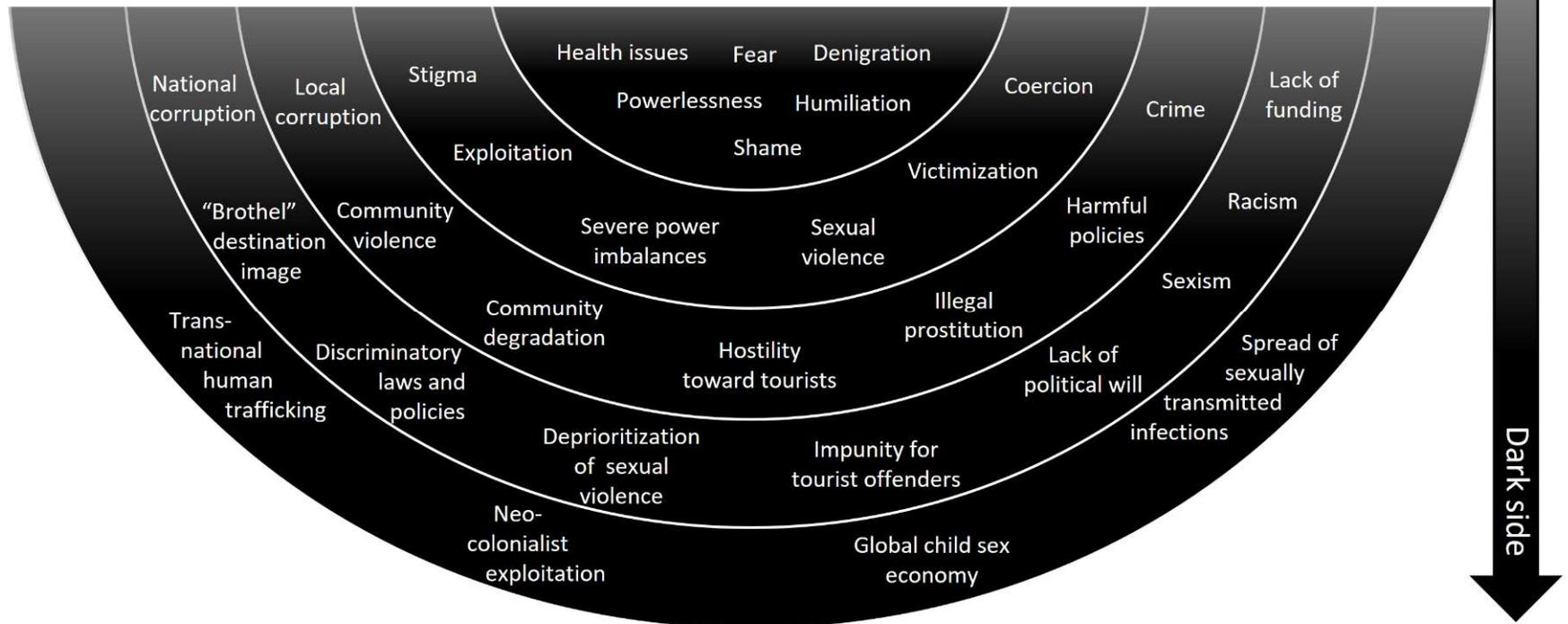


Global social-ecological level

Includes international relationships and organizations, politics, advocacy, legal issues, economics, and technological advances



Sex in Tourism: Light and Dark Influences at the Social-Ecological Levels





SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN TOURISM

Socio-ecological model of sex in tourism in action

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOR TOURISTS

Sexual expression in tourism is a complex phenomenon:

- **the range of sexual activities that takes place in tourism**
- **anonymity, altered socio-cultural norms, time compression, fun-seeking mentality, and situational disinhibition**

Increased sexual risk taking  a cause of morbidity

Tourism  the geographical spread of STIs

Sexual risk taking in tourism is:

- **a complex, multidimensional phenomenon**
- **physical, psychological, socio-cultural, and situational aspects**

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOR TOURISTS

Developing sexual health education for tourists is essential yet challenging

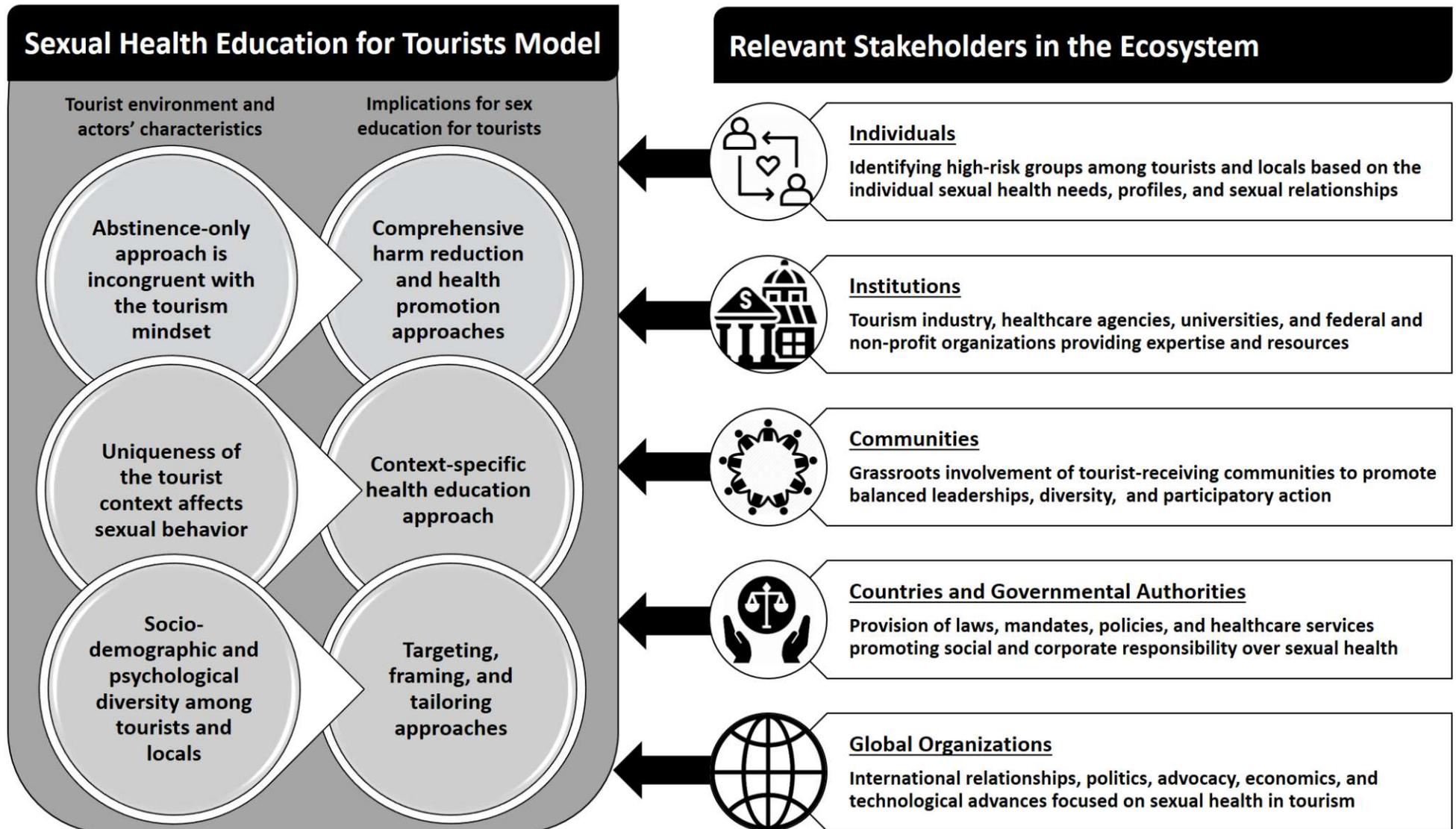
Current sexual health education options for tourists are virtually non-existent

Although sexual health education for tourists is rare, many people welcome the idea

There is a demand and opportunity for including an emphasis on sexual health, behavior, and risks in travel health education

And this is where the socioecological approach is coming in

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOR TOURISTS AND THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ITS DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY



SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOR TOURISTS AND THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

Further research is essential to develop effective sexual health interventions for tourists

Future studies should continue examining the sexual health education models for tourists and the socio-ecological approach to the development and delivery of such education

Tourism scholars and practitioners need to:

- develop the messages and test their effectiveness**
- establish the optimal timing and delivery methods**
- identify the stakeholders to spearhead sexual health education for tourists**
- utilize innovative technologies and sophisticated sexual health education methods**

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**THANK YOU! QUESTIONS AND
COMMENTS ARE VERY WELCOME.**

Liza Berdychevsky
Email: lizabk@illinois.edu

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