

# U.S. and East Europe Collaboration: Developing Successful Research Projects



## 5th European Conference on Clinical and Social Research on AIDS and Drugs, in Vilnius, Lithuania

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# Objectives

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- Why use network approaches for HIV and substance abuse?
- Examples
- Experience in collaborative research with Eastern Europe
- **Research supported by NIDA**



# Social networks & drug use

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- Drug use is a social behavior
- Acquiring drugs through other drug users
- Often use with other drug users



# Types of networks

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- Support networks
- Drug networks
- Risk networks
- Injection drug use



# Delineate networks

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- Recall based on elicitation techniques
- Function (who do you do drugs with)
- Temporal; who did you see yesterday?
- Geographic; who in your neighborhood do you talk to?
- Other approaches, roles, importance



# Why networks?

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- Drug users may be easier to access through their network than through social & medical services
  - Hidden population
  - Stigmatized and illegal
- Network members may be more influential than professionals

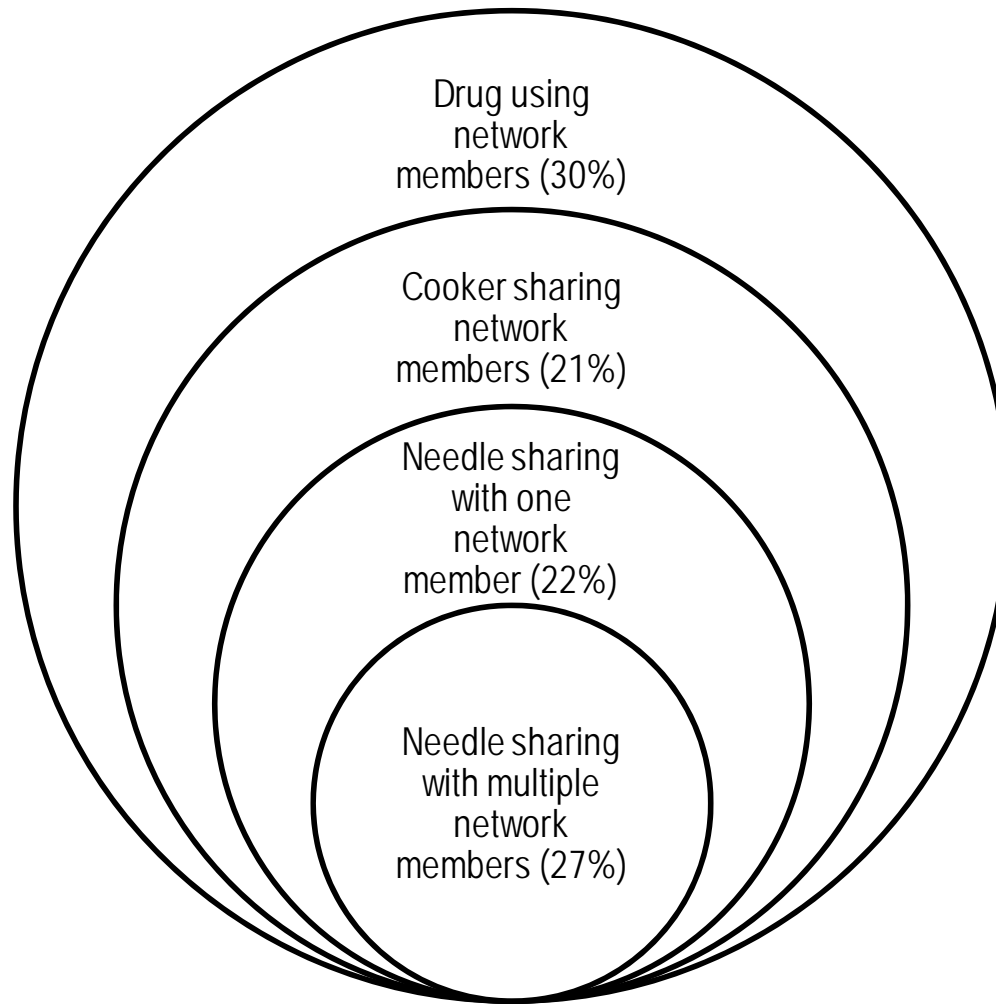


# Utilizing social networks

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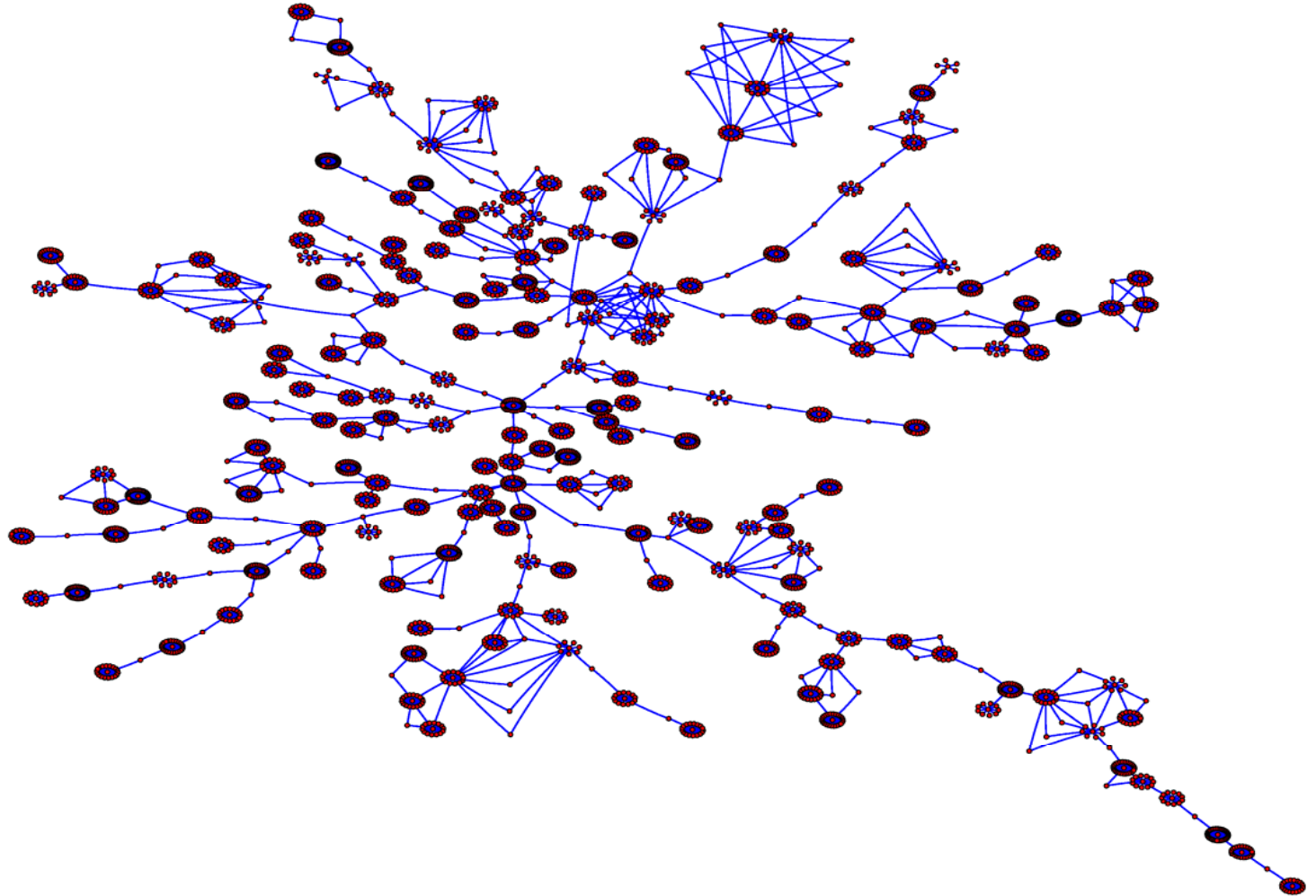
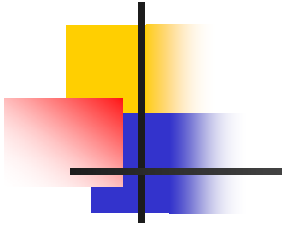
- Examine HIV transmission routes
  - genetic strain analysis
  - Often HIV sexual networks and/or drug networks
- Utilize networks for HIV/HCV prevention
- Network approach to partner tracing (HIV, HCV, HBV)
- HIV medical care and treatment

# Drug users personal risk networks, STEP study

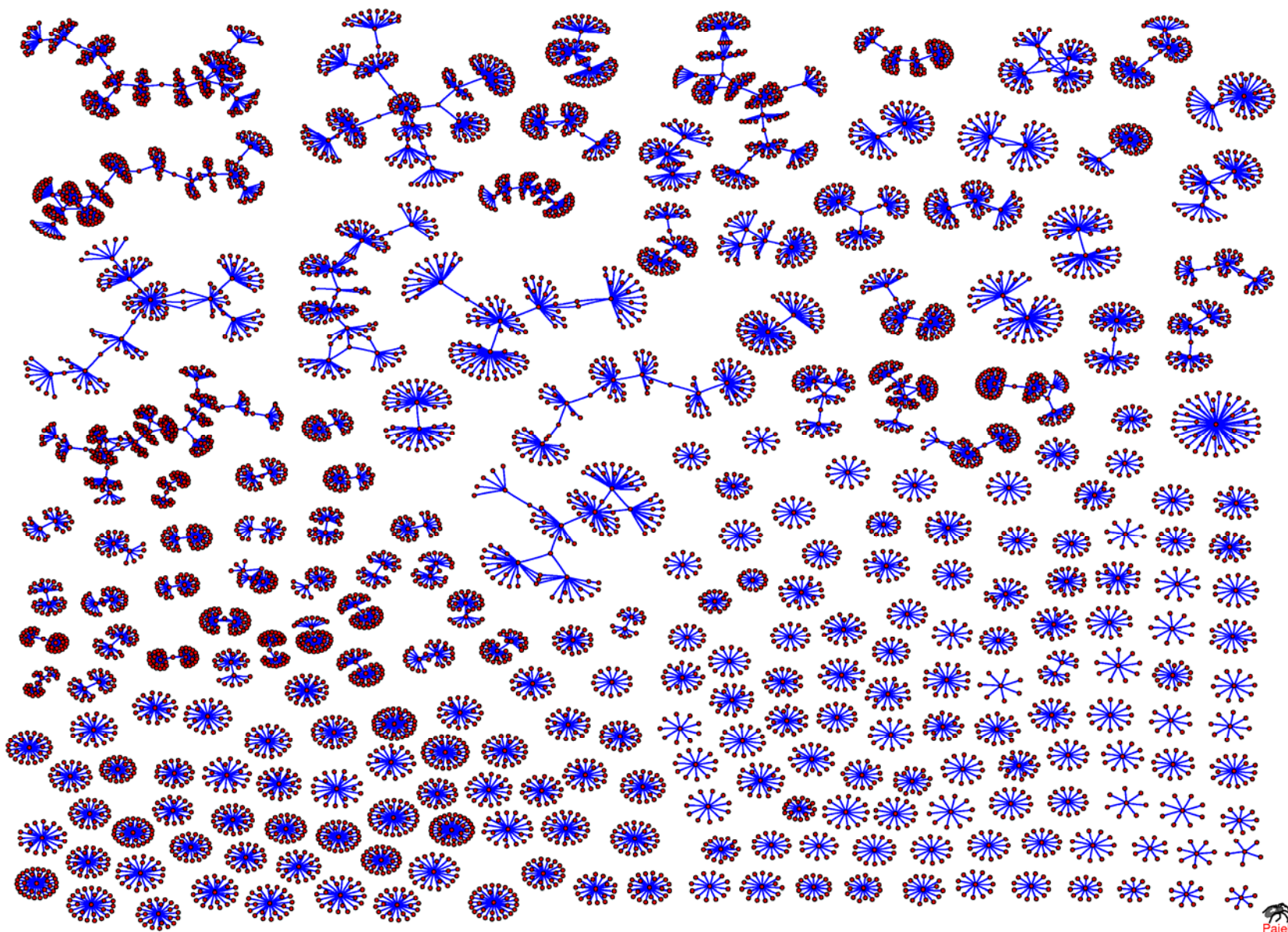




Largest component, “probable” match assumption,  
waves 1, 2, 4 combined (N=3296)



Remaining components, "probable" match assumption,  
waves 1, 2, 4 combined (N=7349)





# Drawbacks

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- Recruitment
- Quality control is difficult for interventions
  - Intervention may occur outside of clinic setting
- Contamination due to interactions among network members
  - May be difficult to assess behavior change between experimentals and controls



# Example of a network prevention intervention

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- A network oriented HIV prevention intervention among injection drug use in St. Petersburg, Russia.
- This is a clinical trial with random assignment.
- Outcomes are HIV status, STIs, and HIV risk behaviors



# Major training issues

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- Small group facilitation
- Recruitment of drug users in community setting
- Social network interviews
- Retention (up to one year)
- VCT and other biological assays (STI)

# Barriers and promoters of collaboration



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- Barriers: Cultural barriers, culture of science barrier, time zones, timeline barriers, IRB barriers (local and US IRBs), currency exchanges, data transfer, supervision of staff.
- Facilitators: Time, communication, dedication, trust
- Recommendations: Best to start with small study to develop infrastructure and rapport
- Need for cultural bridge or liaison, someone with sufficient status respected by investigators in both countries.



**Thank You**

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