

Qualitative research on adolescent
MSM and TG in Pakistan:
Implications for programming of
sexual health and social support
interventions

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The research process

- NACP/MOH, UNAIDS, UNICEF and NGOs
- 2 Pakistani co-researchers/interviewers
- 83 adolescents and young people with MSM experience were interviewed in five Pakistani cities (13-25 years of age)
- Open structured questionnaire
- Recruited via 'purposive sampling', collaboration of NGOs

8 types of adolescent male to male sex

- Adolescent concubinage (*bacha baazi*)
- Sex in which exchange plays a role ('sex work')
- Sex in extended family settings
- Sex in institutional settings
- Sex in work settings (trucks, fishing boats)
- Sex between street-based adolescents
- Sex involving effeminate males (*hijra*)
- Sex within an egalitarian 'gay' framework

Identities and contexts

- Two clear 'identities' (gay and TG), the other six contexts are often not linked to a sexual identity
- Enormous overlap between 8 types
- Not always easy to distinguish between abuse/pleasure, coercion/consent, and, by implication, between social protection/sexual health needs

‘Cultural possibilities’ for male-male sex

- ‘Traditionally’, male to male sex was either:
 - Age-differentiated
 - Gender-differentiated (with TG)
 - ‘Release’-oriented (without identity-aspect)
- Emerging ‘gay’ identity
- Question: what impact could the ‘MSM’ label have? ‘Naming and Framing’

Socioeconomic issues

- Child labor: many boys in public areas
- Large families, crowding
- Poverty facilitates 'exchange sex'
- Domestic violence and other issues fuel the numbers of street-based boys and adolescents

Gender and sexuality

- View that men have 'natural urge' to have sex
- Girls not accessible (religion/traditions)
- Boys free to roam about, mothers have little ability to supervise
- Mothers may have limited ability to conceptualize abuse of their sons
- 'Pleasure sex' versus 'reproductive sex'
- 'Good women' do not do 'pleasure sex'
- Male-male sex is mainly 'fun activity', no consequence YET for hetero-masculinity

Family honor

- Family honor is key to sense of self-worth, especially of men
- Fear to bring 'shame on family' keeps abuse of boys under wraps
- Key reason for stigma and psychological abuse of young effeminate males

Conclusions

- Low knowledge of HIV; low priority
- High HIV vulnerability, almost zero condom use, high self-reported STI
- Group-thinking not helpful: contextual/structural interventions
- Social protection services and sexual health programs need to be integrated
- Silence about boy abuse needs to be broken
- Work towards changing gender norms, promoting universal child rights and rights of 'MSM'