

developing an enabling environment support and care for MSM PLWAs



Shivananda Khan
Naz Foundation International
www.nfi.net

Targeted Interventions on HIV/AIDS Control in India

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Indian Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur, India

Male-to-male sexual context in India

There appears to be two main frameworks of MSM, with an emergent third in major urban areas among the upper middle classes

- *Gendered framework*

Male to male desire based on feminised gendered roles and identification - sexual acts based on gender roles, i.e. man/not-man: primarily *kothis* and *hijras*.

- *Discharge framework*

Male to male sexual behaviours arising from immediate access, opportunity, and “body heat”. They involve males/boys/men from the general male population who will access feminised males, or boys.

- *Emergent gay framework*

Male to male desire framed by sexual orientation. Primarily used by middle and upper classes. Such gay identified men usually seek other gay identified men as sex partners.

Male-to-male sexual context in India

Many males who have sex with males do not see themselves as “homosexual”, or even their behaviour as “homosexual”, since they take on the “manly” penetrating role in male to male sex. Nor do their partners see themselves as homosexuals because they either see themselves as “not men”, or they are involved in play – not sex.

Further many MSM are also married, and/or have sex with females.



- ***“Why do men have sex with men? This is not normal. We kothis are here for them.”***
- ***“I don’t mind if my panthi beats me up. It only shows how manly and powerful he is.”***
- ***“When my parik (“husband”) beats me, I feel as helpless as a woman. Since I want to be a woman, it actually makes me feel good.”***

Male-to-male sexual context in India

- Sexual diversity
- Gender variance
- Multiple frameworks of male-to-male sex
- Gendered framework of sexual practices
- High risk sexual activities
- Bridging behaviours



Risk

- Polymorphous sexual behaviours
- Females less accessible than males because of social policing
- Multiple partners
- Anal sex as primary sexual activity
- Low condom use
- Significant levels of STIs
- Sex with both male and female partners



Risk

- Gendered framework
- Sexual violence
- Poor access to treatment
- Low coverage of appropriate sexual health services
- Poverty



Stigma, discrimination and social exclusion

For feminised MSM

- **Double stigmatisation - feminisation and receptive partners in anal sex.**
- **Self-stigmatisation because of their gendered identities and social exclusion.**

Violence and abuse

From a study conducted by NFI in Bangladesh with feminised males who have sex with males.

- 71% faced with harassment from goondas
- 87% stated that they were subjected to sexual assault or rape because they were effeminate
- 64% stated that they faced police harassment because they were effeminate
- 33% reported sexual assault of rape by 'friends'
- 48% reported sexual assault by police

This level of violence and abuse exists across India also and for the same reasons.

Vulnerability

- Invisibility and denial
- Stigma, discrimination and social exclusion
- Violence and abuse
- Low levels of self-esteem
- Lack of safe spaces
- Disempowerment
- Lack of resources and skills



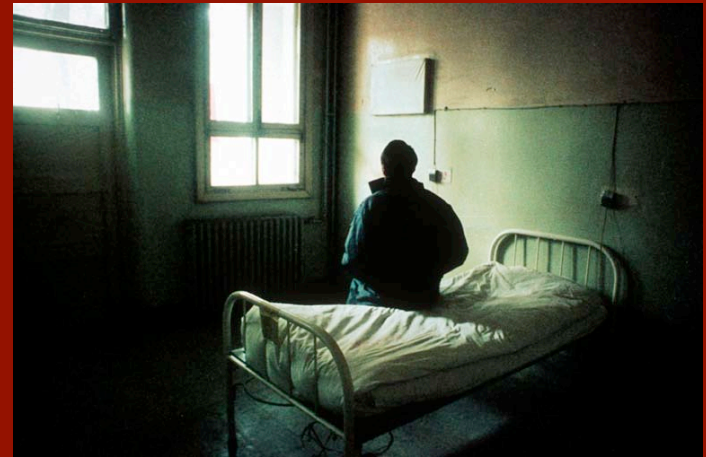
Vulnerability

- Poverty
- Gender-phobia
- Illegality
- Denial of human rights
- Conflict in state policies
- Low service delivery



Living with HIV/AIDS

For MSM living with HIV/AIDS, particularly those who are feminised, stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion is greatly reinforced.



A disempowering environment

What does this mean?

- **Stigma, discrimination and social exclusion affects the ability of vulnerable populations to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS – leads to invisibility and denial**
- **It disempowers them from support and care.**
- **It disenfranchises them from accessing what services may be available.**
- **It reduces opportunities to develop appropriate services.**

Abuse follows infection follows abuse

An enabling environment

What does this mean?

To enable: Authorise, empower, supply with means to take action.

To provide with adequate power, means opportunity, or authority.

Equity: A system of justice founded on principles of human rights, natural justice, and fair conduct.

Thus to develop an enabling environment means to create systems of empowerment, social justice and equity for the most marginalised populations.

An enabling environment

What does this involve?

- **To reduce human rights abuse and violence.**
- **To reduce stigma and discrimination.**
- **To increase self-esteem and empowerment.**
- **To ensure that adequate sanctions exist so that the above are implemented appropriately and adequately.**
- **To have appropriate services developed without discrimination**
- **To have the ability to access appropriate services without fear**

An enabling environment

What does this involve?

- To empower affected and infected populations to develop and deliver their own self-help services.
- To increase the technical skills of service providers.
- To ensure appropriate resources are easily accessible/available.



Key Recommendations

- **Legal, legislative, socio-cultural and judicial impediments to MSM sexual health interventions need to be addressed.**

At the very least, this means that there needs to be a positive dialogue between the Health and Home Ministries in regard to support for marginalised populations in the fight against AIDS.

Along with this is required concerted advocacy to repeal Section 377 of the India Penal Code.

Key Recommendations

- **Address human rights abuse and reduce the levels of sexual violence, harassment and abuse of MSM, and against staff of MSM sexual health service providers through:**
 - a. **appropriate sensitisation and training of law enforcement personnel at all levels, the judiciary, the legal profession, and other institutions**
 - b. **ensure that laws against male-on-male rape and sexual abuse are on the statute books and that these laws are adequately implemented with appropriate sanctions**
 - c. **constructions of masculinity that support gender violence are challenged through appropriate education and awareness**

Key Recommendations

- **Empower local networks of self-identified MSM to develop their own self-help HIV/AIDS service provision including support and care.**

This means ensuring that

- ✓ **appropriate skills training, management support and safe spaces to meet are readily available**
- ✓ **adequate levels of on-going funding are provided**
- ✓ **appropriate resources and tools, such as low-cost condoms and water-based lubricant, education materials, STI treatment, ARVs are easily accessible**

Key Recommendations

- **Ensure that any enabling strategy include key indicators that can be measured in terms of impact assessment.**

This will also mean that sanctions will need to be place to ensure compliance by key stakeholders.

Key Recommendations

- **Central involvement of MSM in policy making, advocacy, and HIV/AIDS interventions at national, state and local level.**

This means that appropriately skilled MSM should be a part of decision making on policy and advocacy through direct involvement and consultation.

Key Recommendations

- **National, state and local HIV/AIDS agencies, both government and non-government, as well as the general community, should be sensitised to the specific issues, concerns and needs of MSM.**

This means education and training programmes targeted at specific organisations, groups and individuals utilising a broad range of resources and media.

Key Recommendations

- **Staff of STI treatment centres and VTCs should be provided with skills training to ensure that their services are appropriate, empowering and accessible to MSM.**

This means that such staff understand issues, concerns and sexual health, support and care needs of MSM and can ensure that they provide a sympathetic and caring service.