

# Under the Blanket

*Male-to-male sexualities and  
sexual health in South Asia*

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# The MSM context in South Asia

There appears to be three main frameworks of MSM, with an emergent fourth 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

- *Discharge framework*

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

- *Age-related framework*

This reflects the “beardless youth” construct of male-to-male desire, where the older man forms a pederastic relationship with a younger male (*the Halekon of Afghanistan*)

# The MSM context in South Asia

Many males from the general male population will also access feminised-identified males (*kothis/zenanas/metis/hijras*) for anal/oral sex . These males do not see themselves as “homosexuals”, or even their behaviour as “homosexual”, since they take on the “manly” penetrating role in male to male sex.

And of course not to forget, males/men in all male institutions, such as prisons, the uniformed forces, colleges, university, schools, religious institutions, and just places where males congregate

# The MSM context in South Asia

- *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.



# **Sociocultural frameworks of male-to-male sexual availability in South Asia**

- **Patriarchal social structures within a culture that is homosocial and homoaffectionalist**
- **Public domain as a male space**
- **Gender segregation, with females socially policed and difficult to sexually access**
- **Poverty and personal survival strategies**

# Sociocultural frameworks of male-to-male sexual availability in South Asia

- **Mass male migration and shared spaces**
- **A dominant masculinity which sees a MAN as the penetrating male and who can maintain his “manliness” even when he penetrates another male**
- **A gendered construction where males who are sexually penetrated are constructed as “not-men”**
- **Non-vaginal sex not seen as sex, but as play, *masti*, discharge**

# Why do males have sex with males?

- **Desire for other males**  
–gender/orientation
- **Desire for specific acts – anal/oral**
- **Pleasure and enjoyment from discharge – “body heat” – also play curiosity**
- **Wives do not do anal or oral sex – ashamed to ask**



# Why do males have sex with males?



- **Males are easier to access**  
– shared beds and spaces  
while females are more socially policed and more difficult to access
- **Protecting a girls virginity**  
– maintaining chastity
- **For money**

# Male-to-male sex prevalence

## India

- 25% of medical students at Patna Medical College in a 1992 survey revealed that they had same-sex relationships (Wyatt, 1993)
- Of the 1500 men who replied to a questionnaire in an English men's magazine in India, Debonair, 29.5% stated that had sex with another man before the age of 20 years (Roy Chan, et al. 1998)

## Pakistan

- 20% of men in one rural area have male-to-male sex
- 40% of men living in a Karachi squatter settlement had male-to-male sex
- 72% of truck drivers in central Karachi had sex with other males, while 76% had sex with female sex workers

*July 1996 edition of AIDS Analysis Asia*

# Male-to-male sex prevalence

In Bangladesh, ICDDR,B reported in the 2003 behavioural surveillance report:

**22% of rickshaw pullers had male-to-male sex**

**In Sri Lanka, 50% of male university students reported that their first sexual experience was with another male**

*Youth and Sexual Risk in Sri Lanka, Women and AIDS Research Programme, Washington DC, International Centre for Research on Women, 1997, Silva, K.T. et al*

***In other words, male-to-male sex with high risk activities is very common and not just within an isolated “target group” – hidden, surrounded by secrecy, under the blanket***

# **Why work with male-to-male sexual behaviours and HIV?**

**MSM is not an exclusive group, or target group, isolated from the general population**

**It involves males from the general male population along with males with specific gender/sexual orientations**

**Male-to-male sex is a bridging behaviour also - It involves males, females, and children**

**Transmission routes: male-to-male-to-female  
female-to-male-to-male**

## Key recommendations for action

- **The social construction of the dominant masculinity needs to be challenged and addressed as a part of any gender sensitivity to address sexual violence and stigma against feminised males and females**
- **Assistance to support self-help HIV/AIDS service provision  
by and for vulnerable male populations, i.e. *kothis, hijras,*  
gay-identified men**
- **Sexual health strategies developed for female partners  
of MSM**

# Key recommendations for action

- Unprotected anal sex as a risk behaviour needs to be included in all sexual health education programmes for the general public, all occupational groups, and other vulnerable male populations
- STI treatment centres skilled up to deal with anal STIs, MSM, and female partners of MSM



# Human Rights also means Sexual Rights for All

