

Advocacy, policy and support on male sexualities

Male sex workers and changing landscape of HIV Prevention treatment, care and support

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Males who have sex with males

- Often considered as an identity and not as behaviour
- Multiplicity of identities, frameworks, practices
- In south Asia primary framework is based on gendered as in heterosexual communities
- Kothi/zenana – feminised males – face similar issues of gender phobia
- Most of self-identified kothis are from low income populations and often opt for sex work as a survival strategy
- But not all male sex workers are low-income males

Sex work! - Issues

- **Often a term used for female sex workers only**
- **Males are as much a part of sex industry as women and let us not forget our transgendered co – workers**
- **Traditional ignorance**
- **Hostility towards the profession**

Issues

- **Unfortunately the development of arguments for or against sex work and studies on sex work have until recently continued on gender bias overshadowed by moral concepts, with no concern for males in sex work, either as workers, or more glaringly, as clients.**
- **The bias is a by product of sexism in or society that oppresses women at every turn**

Issues

Problem of sexism is the assumption that either males are not sex workers, or males selling sex do not need protection, rights or support. Since men cause all the problems in sex work, what do male sex workers have to worry about?

Issues

- **The male who has sex with other men for money but is not gay-identified is another creature who, because he does not fit in any of the existing structures, gets placed in whatever cage is left over in the WHAT ARE YOU? Zoo**
- **The gay community doesn't want them, the sex worker community won't touch them.**

Male commercial sex work

Males may engage in sex work for a number of reasons: sex may be exchanged for gifts, drugs, shelter, as well as money, and this behaviour provides a survival mechanism for some young men in large cities.

- **Males involved in sex work do appear to be at higher risk for HIV infection and often engage in other high risk behaviours, such as injectable drug use.**
- **Transgender sex workers appear to be particularly vulnerable to HIV acquisition as compared to male sex workers (22% vs 3.6%) [Indonesia – Dr. D. A. Lewis, Head of STI Reference Centre]**

Other studies

Vancouver, Canada – British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV /AIDS, St Paul’s Hospital

- **16% reported involved in sex trade**
- **Sex trade workers had a significantly higher HIV prevalence compared to non – sex trade workers (7.3% Vs 1.1%)**
- **Sex trade workers had a significantly higher HIV incidence compared to non – sex trade workers (4.7% Vs 0.9%)**

The increased vulnerability of male sex workers for HIV infection might be well because of gendered identities, stigma and discrimination, illegality, violence and abuse, unfavourable living conditions, substance use and sexual risk behaviours.

Male sex work – South Asian context

Most of the male to male sex work happens in dark, in parks, in public toilets, in cinema halls, behind the bushes making it extremely difficult for promoting condom usage as the conditions are not conducive.

There is an almost complete denial of male sex work

Microbicide

A rectal microbicide combined with a lubricant might well be an answer to the problem. It can provide double protection, if used well along with the condom.

It is the right time for research on rectal microbicide to be taken more seriously.

Quote: Gerald Hannon, Canadian Professor, writer and male sex worker

**The thing is we will always be here, and we will
always be here because you will always need us.
You need us because you need sex, at times, when
it is not possible or convenient to get it from
anybody else.**

So you can choose.

You can choose to damage us with laws [and] you can choose to damage yourselves in the process, because hypocrisy always brutalises. You can choose to damage the communities in which we live, or you can choose to accept.

You can choose to work together with us for... some kind... of future.....The choice is really on you. (From: M is for Mutual A is for Acts –Dan Allman for HIV Social, Behavioural & Epidemiological Studies Unit, University of Toronto)