

Advocacy, policy and support on male sexualities

Gender, sexualities, male to male sexual behaviour – addressing vulnerabilities



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Key issues

- **Sexual diversity and polymorphous sexual behaviours**
- **For many a gendered framework of male-to-male sexual behaviours**
- **Many 'MSM' perceive themselves as a part of 'real man'/'not-man' binary**
- **Gendered performance, poverty, low educational status**

Key issues

- **Marriage as socially compulsory**
- **Early sexual debut often arising from gendered performativity**
- **Gender segregation and social control of females**
- **Often male-to-male sex perceived within a context of play - not sex**

What are the vulnerabilities and risks?

- Evidence indicate high levels of abuse, violence and rape of feminised males who have sex with males
- The social, legal and judicial environment was having a detrimental impact on sexual health interventions
- In a gendered framework of male-to-male sex the issue of feminisation, as much as that of sexual practice, can itself lead to violence, abuse and harassment.

Human Rights study – Findings (N = 240)

Marriage

34% of respondents were married.

- Marriage was obligatory, irrespective of personal preference and choice.
- 32 out of 81 respondents who were married stated that their wives knew that they had sex with other men.
- Claimed that they had accepted it, or were incapable of doing anything about it.

It needs to be recognised that to divorce is highly stigmatising for the woman, and often leads to ostracisation.

Findings:

Sexual debut

25% of respondents stated that their friends had sexually abused them

- For most *kothi*-identified males, early sexual debut is the norm, usually between 6 to 14 years of age, and usually when they first display feminised characteristics.
- This sexual experience was usually coercive, with older adolescents, friends, schoolteachers, male relative, or neighbourhood person.

It appears that femininity in a male is considered an indication that a person is sexually available and can be exploited.

Findings:

Harassment, abuse and violence

- 42% reported that they had been sexually assaulted or raped by policemen.
- 60% reported sexual assault or rape by *goondas*.
- 75% of those reporting being sexually assaulted or raped by either policemen or *goondas*, stated that this occurred because they were effeminate.
- 70% of respondents reported facing harassment from police, ranging from extortion, blackmail, beatings, restrictions to movement, and disclosure of sexual practices to *goondas* and family members.

Findings:

Education, poverty, & vulnerability to violence

- **50% stated that fellow students or teachers harassed them in school or college because they were effeminate, drastically affecting their education and employment opportunities.**
- **70% stated that the fact that they had sex with other males has had negative impact on their economic prospects.**
- **45% respondents stated that their effeminacy had affected their work opportunities.**
- **82% respondents stated that if they were not *kothis*, they would have better job opportunities.**

Findings

Education, poverty, & vulnerability to violence

- **64% of respondents had a monthly income of between 1000-3000 Rupees.**
- **On being asked whether being a kothi had affected the income earning capacity of the person, 90% of the respondents states yes.**
- **75% of the respondents stated that the effect on their income was because they were in sex work.**

Findings:

“I don’t mind if my ‘husband’ beats me up. It only shows how manly and powerful he is”

Because feminised males do not live up to the expected normative standards of masculine behaviour, this leads to the notion that those who are feminised can be exploited and abused, that being feminised somehow weakens the person, a notion that is often internalised by *kothis* themselves.

Accepted notions around masculinity and effeminacy are therefore one of the major factors that lead to disempowerment and opens perceived feminised males to abuse and assault and to a denial of service provision.

How to address the issues?

- **Sensitisation training at all levels of the police force on MSM issues along with the general principals of fundamental human rights.**
- **Work with the police and the judiciary, especially the criminal justice system, to ensure that instances of violence and abuse and rape are addressed and legally redressed.**

How to address the issues?

Advocacy work aimed at changing appropriately the discriminatory laws such as:

- **Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and the Bangladesh Penal Code respectively.**
- **The laws relating to obscenity that impede dissemination of sexual health information and make MSM outreach workers and educators vulnerable to police excesses.**
- **The laws relating to public conduct and nuisance that are often used to target MSM in public areas of congregation**

How to address the issues?

- **Address the social construction of masculinity and *gender phobia* (a part of that construction)**
- **Deconstruct notions that violence against feminised males (*and females*) is socially permissible, and that such males are less than human.**
- **There needs to be educational work on masculinity and gender and the way the distorted stereotype of gender affects MSM, especially feminised MSM.**
- **Such advocacy work needs to be conducted with educational institutions to address the issues of institutionalised homophobia/gender phobia.**

How to address the issues?

- **Activities that provide economic empowerment to MSM, including schemes like micro-credit and income generation project.**
- **New CBOs should be funded immediately.**
- **Capacity building of SACS as well as new CBOs on MSM issues.**
- **Work also needs to be done on gender sensitisation and MSM with industry bodies and labour unions.**
- **Psychological counselling and psychiatric help should be made part of HIV intervention efforts amongst MSM.**

Mobilising the communities of males who have sex with males (kothis) and hijras

What binds them together?

- **Their gendered (kothi) identity.**
- **Their sexual behaviour**
- **Their desire for men.**
- **Common issues of harassment at home as well as work place**

Forming the networks

How?

- **Snow ball approach**
- **Word of mouth**
- **Community led initiatives**
- **By the community, of the community, and for the community.**



Thank you for your attention

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