

Advocacy, policy and support on male sexualities

Personal Perspectives on **Who? What?**

SIDA LGBT workshop
Colombo, Sri Lanka

15th October, 2007

A regional organisation

Currently working now in 7 countries in West, South, and South-East Asia

Area of work

Male-male sexualities and sexual health, with a focus on HIV

Male-male sexualities, desires and practice

- **Same-sex/same gender/sameness**
- **Same-sex/different gender/differences**
- **Same sex/same gender/different ages**

But what do we mean by sex, gender, masculinity, femininity, and gender performance as key identity markers?

And what do we mean by identity, sexual orientation, gender orientation?

And in the context of this workshop

What do we mean by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender?

Not to forget Intersexed and Queer.

In a globalising context?

In a national context?

In a local context?

Is there a universal language?

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Just who are we talking about?

**A universe of self-identities and labels that
arise, not so much from sexual orientation,
but from gendered performance**

South Asia context

**Masculine males who define themselves as “real men” -
and who are labelled as giryas, panthis, tas, husbands by**

**Feminised males who self-identify as halekon, kothis,
metis, zenanas, and of course**

Hijras

Satla kothis

Nirvan kothis

But not to forget other labelling arising from feminised males for other men and the use of English

Double-deckers

Do-parathas

AC/DC

And abusive labelling such as chapati-chapati

And parallel to this profusion

Are those who identify with the term gay, bisexual, homosexual, heterosexual, and so on.

However, it has been my experience that use of specific terms also rely on language, economic class, and access to English.

And in the context of NFI's work there is also the broad range of male-to-male sexual practices and desires where no labelling is involved

Those “real men” who sexually access feminised males and youth.

In all male institutions.

And in highly gendered and segregated societies, each other.

While in terms of HIV and sexual health, to make matters even more complicated and perverse

Men/males who have sex with men/males, or

MSM

And there are significant problems with the use of this epidemiological label. What are they?

Questions

So who are gay men, bisexuals, and transgenders?

And in the context of South Asia, who are lesbians?

**Identities based on sexual practice, emotional desires,
gendered performance?**

How do you define these identities?

Rights

What are these rights we so often speak about?

What meaning, significance and context within South Asia cultures, societies, religious values?

Who defines them as universal rights?

Who are they for in the context of what you will be discussing?

The Yogyakarta Principles

A set of principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity

Developed and unanimously adopted by a distinguished group of human rights experts from diverse backgrounds including judges, academics, members of treaty bodies, NGOs and others

Seminar in Yogyakarta, Indonesia at Gadjah Mada University 6-9 November 2006

NFI: 4 key areas of work

- 1. Development and capacity building of MSM HIV and sexual health organisation**
- 2. International and national advocacy on sexual health rights**
- 3. International and national advocacy increasing investment and scaling up coverage**
- 4. Increasing knowledge and understanding**

Focus

- **Low income populations**
- **High risk and vulnerability**
- **Low access to services, knowledge and skills**

In South Asia this tends to be those who have

- **Multiple partners**
- **Vulnerable because of their gender performance**
- **Poor**

Sexual health

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, a well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

***World Health Organisation
Draft working definition, October 2002***

Context of mobilising

- **Sexual and friendship networks**
- **No real community**
- **Situational identities**
- **Social, cultural and religious compulsions**

The seven step process

- **Identify**
- **Assist and support**
- **Develop**
- **Mobilise**
- **Advocate**
- **Network**
- **Coalitions**

Process

- **Identify key persons in these networks**
- **Through them recruit others in the networks**
- **Recruit, provide skills and capacity building training**
- **Assist them to develop their own organisations**
- **Implement community building and development strategies**
- **Advocate funding support**
- **Network with others nationally and regionally**
- **Develop coalitions and allies**

Cultural clash

Contemporary Western cultures have arisen from 16th, 17th and 18th century ideologies to current consumerist cultural thinking of the autonomous and independent individual where personal guilt is the primary framework of social control

Cultural clash

South Asian cultures are still predominantly based on the Individual being subsumed within family and community Duties, obligations and rights.

In the context of non-conformity this leads to a conflict being individual rights and family/community rights.

Socially compulsory marriage is one example of this.

Shame is the primary framework of social control

Ways forward?

Well that is up to you!

A red flag to a bull?

Ways forward?

That what works in Stockholm may not work in ...

**And that what works in Mumbai, may not work in Karachi,
or Dhaka, or Kabul, or even in Colombo**

Good Practice instead of Best Practice

An evolving language of rights?

- **Citizenship**
- **Social justice**
- **Social inclusion**
- **Sexual rights**
- **Being human**
- **Dignity and worth**
- **Developing human capabilities to the fullest**
- **Alliances and coalitions**

South Asia



Afghanistan

Bangladesh

Bhutan

India

Maldives

Nepal

Pakistan

Think globally, act locally

Thank you

Questions to confound?