

# Disclosure of HIV status by HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) to their sexual partners:

## Implications for counselling practice & intervention design

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# BACKGROUND



Disclosure of HIV status may have important implications for HIV prevention. As part of a qualitative study exploring the care/support and prevention needs of HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) in Chennai, perspectives and contexts of disclosure of HIV status and its association with safer sex with sexual partners was explored.

# METHODS

- In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 HIV-positive *Kothi*-identified<sup>1</sup> MSM (including married MSM) and three key informants.
- Participants were recruited using respondent-driven/purposive sampling.
- All transcribed/translated interviews were subjected to narrative thematic analysis.

<sup>1</sup>Note: '*Kothis*' are same-sex attracted feminine males *who* are supposed to be mainly receptive partners in sexual encounters and they mainly choose masculine persons whom they call as '*Panthi*'.

# RESULTS

Findings are grouped into four categories to look at the relation between disclosure and safer sex:

- a) Nondisclosure and unprotected sex**
- b) Nondisclosure and protected sex**
- c) Disclosure and protected sex**
- d) Disclosure and unprotected sex**

## ***a) Nondisclosure and unprotected sex***

A married MSM couldn't discuss condom use with his wife who had already undergone tubectomy (sterilisation operation).

*“We have two children. She had undergone family control operation. You tell me how can I use condoms with her. Tell me how to say her that I have HIV?...”*

Fear of physical violence prevented MSM from disclosing to policemen and ruffians who had forced sex with them.

*“They took us to police station and during night one policeman asked me to come to the bathroom [toilet]....he had sex with me in the back...I did not have condoms at that time since I was only in my underwear...I also could not talk about condoms...even if we show condoms they will beat us in our hands with lathi [police stick]”*

Some male sex workers who regularly stand in a particular place to get clients talked about inability to use condoms with ruffians [referred to as “*Beelis*”]

*“They [ruffians] have sex with us...we can not talk about condoms with them...they will beat...they also show knife...they have hurt me using [shaving] blades...they also take away our money...”*

## b) Nondisclosure and protected sex

A participant could use condoms with his wife since “sex happens in night” & she “does not look down”

*“My wife never looks down when I have sex with her. So I can use condoms with out her knowledge and take away the condom as I come out [of her]...every thing happens in the dark...”.*

Thus practicing safer sex with his wife might have made this person not to disclose his HIV status.



Some could persuade their casual/paying male partners to use condoms or avoid unprotected anal sex.

*“I will say - ‘now we are hearing about big diseases [AIDS]....you might have gone to many [persons]...I might have gone to many...so why don’t we use condoms”*”

## c) Disclosure and protected sex



Male Steady partners of some participants used condoms after disclosure. Condom use continued after that steady partner was found to be HIV-positive.

## d) Disclosure and unprotected sex



Male casual partners of some MSM disbelieved the disclosure and insisted on having unprotected sex. Even after disclosure a participant continued to have unprotected sex with his steady male partner since it was believed that his partner already may have been infected with HIV.

# CONCLUSIONS

- Disclosure is not unilaterally associated with protected sex; and non-disclosure may lead to protected or unprotected sex in different contexts
- Counsellors need to explore possible solutions to deal with the various contextual factors that prevent HIV-positive MSM from having safer sex
- Appropriate interventions are needed to address the various structural barriers in practising safer sex among HIV-positive MSM