

What's in a name?

**Working with male-male
sexualities, masculinities and
genders in South Asia and
sexual health programming**

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The work of NFI is around male-male sex and sexual health.

The following focuses on male-male sex issues, and does not address frameworks of female-female sex, relationships and identities.

Denial, ignorance, illegality, myths, fears, violence, abuse, exclusion, and invisibility, create a discourse that stigmatises much of male-to-male sexual behaviours in society and increases vulnerability and risk to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

At the same time, current discourses on sexual identities, sexual orientation, and “sexual minorities”, can increase the invisibility of much male-to-male sex, risk and vulnerability and those involved with it.

First gay 'marriage' in Pakistan...

A gay couple have become the first to get "married" in Pakistan, according to reports from the region. Witnesses said a 42-year-old Afghan refugee held a marriage ceremony with a local tribesman of 16 in the remote Khyber region bordering Afghanistan.....

BBC news 5 October 2005

The problem with naming!

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Misuse of the term "gay" and the term "marriage"

This story was widely publicised in Western media...

While this social sanctioning of this type of relationship goes back hundreds of years.

However the use of the terms "gay" and "marriage" created enormous social tensions resulting in violence against the man and boy, and both being arrested.

Why?

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A binary world


Mind	Body
Man	Woman
Male	Female
Masculine	Feminine
Young	Old
Heterosexual	Homosexual
Straight	Gay

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Western cultures see a binary world where a “thing” is “either this OR that. We are taught to see the world this way.

To live in a world which is not so black OR white is very difficult for us. One has only to recount the debates around LGBT issues over the last 30 to 40 years.

South Asia cultures however are not based so clearly on either/or frameworks, but rather on a spectrum of attributes, social obligations and expectations, along with rules and regulations.

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A trinary world

South Asia

Man **Not-man** **Woman**

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Thus we do not see the world in singularities such as
Sexuality,
Masculinity
Femininity
Gender
Homosexuality
Identity

But rather pluralities
Sexualities
Masculinities
Femininities
Genders
Homosexualities
Identities

Male-male sexual frameworks

Gendered framework

Male to male desire based on feminised gendered roles an identification - sexual acts based on gender roles, i.e. man/not-man

Across all countries in the region



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Thus, the primary framework of male-male sex and identities in South Asia involving low-income populations (the majority) is based on gender performance and sex roles.

Males who are feminised and whose primary sex role is receptivity, perceive themselves as less than men, as not men, and their sense of self and identity is gender based.

Thus kothis, metis, zenanas, hijras and related terms. These are self identity terms.

Such males are stigmatised for their femininity as much as for their receptivity

The penetrating partner perceives himself and is perceived by his sexual partner as a man. His identify is his manliness. He does not perceive himself as a “homosexual”, nor is he perceived as such. He does what men do - penetrate.

“Why do men have sex with men? This is not normal. We *kothis/zenana* are here for them”.

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

“When my *parik* (“husband”) beats me, I feel as helpless as a woman. Since I want to be a woman, it actually makes me feel good”.

A gendered perspective on male-male sex and sexuality



Discharge framework

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

Across all countries in the region - also involves males in all-male institutions

While it is not unusual for men to form emotional relationships with “not-men” these are perceived as men/women relationships. However, for a majority of such men, in societies of the social policing of women, lack of access, immediacy of so-called “body-heat” sexually penetrating a feminised male (or adolescent male since such a person is also not-man) is seen in the context of body need.

Friendship

Opportunistic - body heat, mutual desire and friendship

Doing *masti*

Across the region



This does not mean that there are not patterns of egalitarianism and sexual relationships do exist in the context of sameness.

However this is also bound within concepts of what is termed sex and what is term “masti” or mischief.

Sex is defined in terms of vaginal penetration. All else is not “real sex” - it is fun, masti.

Beardless boys

Older men form relationships with adolescent males - usually between 12 and 17 years before these males can grow beards.

Such boys are not men

Primarily in Afghanistan and NWFP in Pakistan, but also exists to some extent across the region

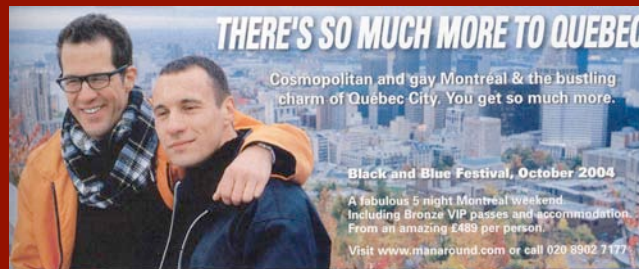


In Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, the concept of the halekon, the bacha baresh, the dancing boy, exists.

These are “beautiful boys” who are beardless, and are objects of desire for men. This fits into the trinary gender construct.

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.**



At the same time, among the emergent middle-class, with access to English, the internet and the globalising LGBT discourse, there is an emergent gay framework

Egalitarian male-male relationships based on sameness and not difference.

However note that in South Asia, marriage is socially compulsory.

Identities and/or behaviour



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Thus, a married zenana who will act as a dutiful husband to his wife and produce children, will in other situations, act as a dutiful wife to his panthi, or as a zenana when seeking a sexual partner.

Many males from the general male population will also access feminised-identified males or “beardless boys” 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. Nor do their partners see themselves as homosexuals because they either see themselves as “not men”, or they are involved in play - not sex.

Who is involved in male-to-male sex?

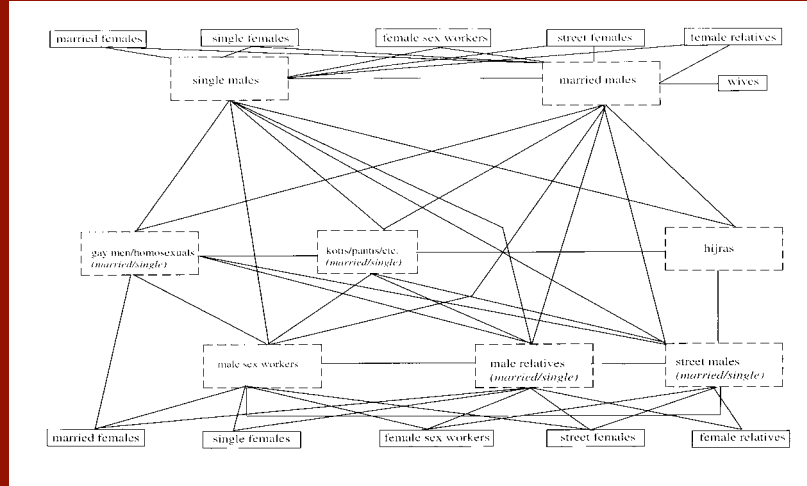
- Feminine males who desire other males - receptive
- Masculine males who desire other males - penetrative
- Adolescent males who have sex with older males
- Males who both penetrate and get penetrated
- Males who just want anal or oral sex - discharge
- Situational male-male sex behaviours

Frameworks of male-to-male sex

- Egalitarian
- Gender-based
- Intergenerational
- Family
- Discharge
- Coercive
- Institutional
- Ritual/Cultural
- Occupational
- Practice
- Play
- Economic

A range of homosexualities

Pattern of male-male sex



Not black and white, but polymorphous, ambiguous, and porous.

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Naming

<u>Receptive</u>	<u>Penetrative</u>	<u>Other</u>
Kothi	Girya	Double-decker
Meti	Panthi	AC/DC
Zenana	Ta	Do-paratha
Bacha Bazi	Parik	Chapati-Chapati
Halekon		
Hijra		

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Note that in the naming process, labels arise from the receptive partners. Thus the labels for penetrative partners and others are not self-identities.

Thus terms such as double-decker, ac/dc and do-paratha reflect behaviour where the person is both receptive and penetrative in male-male sexual encounters.

Chapati-chapati reflect male-male sex between two feminised males (kothis)

These terms are abusive terms.

“Why do men have sex with men? We kothis are here for them.”

Male-to-male sex prevalence

25% of medical students at Patna Medical College in a 1992 survey revealed that they had same-sex relationships (H/V. 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)

A survey of 527 truck drivers in northeast India revealing that 15% had sex with men (S.I. Ahmed, 1993)

In Bangladesh, a study conducted by the International Centre for Diarrhoea Diseases Research, Bangladesh in 2002 indicated that over 22% of rickshaw pullers had sex with other males.

**In Pakistan, the July 1996 edition of AIDS Analysis
Asia reported that:**

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**

Male-to-male sex is substantive across South Asia.

From the frontline

- 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.

Crossing gender boundaries -

What we have is genderphobia, not so much homophobia

A long way to go

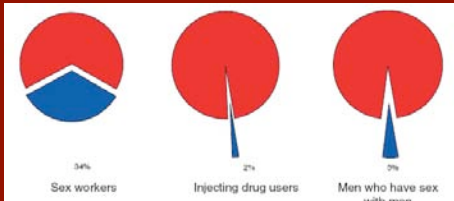


Figure 5.3: Coverage of most-at-risk populations by HIV prevention services in Asia, 2005

Source: J. Stover and M. Fahnstock (2006), *Coverage of Selected Services for HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Treatment in Low- and Middle-income Countries in 2005*, Washington, DC: Constella Futures, POLICY Project.



Figure 2.16: Annual new HIV infections in adults by population group: a decline from early prevention successes, an increase from current failures

Source: Asian Epidemic Model estimates for the Asian region.

Low coverage

Rising HIV prevalence

Issues

- **Low condom use**
- **Significant rates of STIs**
- **Significant rates of HIV**
- **Multiple partners**
- **Sexual violence**
- **Illegality**
- **Stigma and discrimination**
- **Low service coverage**
- **Poor education**
- **poverty**

A range of issues impact risk and vulnerability, particularly those who self-identify as feminised males and are primarily receptive partners of “normative” men.

Must deal with resource poor settings, with limited access to medical support and care, clean water and good nutrition.

Issues

The circumcision debate

Muslims are circumcised, but the evidence shows that it may be more effective for those who penetrate! Thus receptive males are not protected by this

Lubricant

Access to water-based lubricant is very limited to non-existent, or too costly

Rectal microbicide

An ideal solution if we can be assured that it is cheap, combined with a water-based lubricant, broadly distributed and easy accessibility, delivered in sachets

Not to forget that in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan the vast majority of males are already circumcised, while in India circumcision is confronted with religion.

In the region most males do not have access to private spaces, so much sex takes place in “public” places, not one’s home. Carrying tubes of lubricant would not be possible (carrying condoms can be problematic too in regard to legal codes), while using enemas to deliver rectal microbicides would not be possible because the majority of people bathe in public spaces, and access to clean water is problematic.

Knowledge

For further information go to www.nfi.net/publications.htm for a range of reports, articles, and presentations that address the issues raised in this presentation.