Risk Behavior and HIV Prevalence among MSM: A Venue-Based Study in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Study Objectives

• To determine the HIV prevalence, transmission risk factors, and level of knowledge about HIV transmission methods among the MSM community of Kuala Lumpur.
Results

Venue
• 3 clubs, 2 massage parlors, 8 saunas, and 1 park
• Due to the sensitive nature of homosexuality in Malaysia and the ongoing threat of police raids, care was taken to keep the names and locations of selected venues confidential
Results

Study participants

• 529 participants met eligibility criteria
  • At least 18 years of age
  • Self-identifying as gay or bisexual or having sexual interaction with another man in the past five years
  • Residing in Kuala Lumpur or having visited the city at least 3x in the past 6 years for the purpose of sex with another man.
Demographics

- Ethnicity
  - Malay: 243 (47.0)
  - Chinese: 226 (43.7)
  - Indian: 26 (5.0)
  - Other: 22 (4.3)

- Education
  - Secondary or less: 180 (34.8)
  - Diploma/vocational: 155 (30.0)
  - University: 182 (35.2)
Demographics

• Sexual orientation
  – Homosexual/gay 329 (63.6)
  – Hetero/bi/confused 178 (34.4)
HIV Prevalence

• 20 (3.9%) tested positive for HIV
• Predictors of testing positive for HIV
  – recruited in a sauna (compared to a club)
  – being of Malay or “other”
Risk Behavior

• 37.9% (196) reported 2-5 partners
• 25.7% (133) reported > 6 male partners in the past 6 months

Common risk behaviors
• Unprotected sex with a regular (steady) male partner (37.1%),
• Unprotected sex with a casual male partner (44.9%)
• Unprotected insertive anal sex (34.8%)
• Unprotected receptive anal sex (27.9%)
Risk Behaviour

- Group sex involving at least two other men (33.3%)
- Sex while under the influence of recreational drugs and alcohol (23.8% and 23.2%, respectively)
- (47.2%) found male partners on the internet in the past six months
Knowledge of Transmission Methods

• 79.9% and 80.5% of participants correctly identified insertive and receptive anal sex, respectively, as possible methods of HIV transmissions.
Risk Factors for HIV

- Having unprotected sex with a casual male partner
- Having unprotected receptive anal sex in the past six months
- Having group sex in the past six months
Knowledge of HIV transmission methods

Varied across racial groups

• Malays were significantly more likely to incorrectly believe HIV could be transmitted through sharing food.

• Indians were significantly more likely to believe HIV could not be transmitted through sharing needles.
Knowledge of HIV transmission methods

- Indians, and “other” races were all significantly more likely to incorrectly believe HIV could not be transmitted through insertive anal sex as compared to Chinese.

- Indians were also significantly more likely to incorrectly believe receptive anal sex could not transmit HIV
Conclusion

- HIV prevalence of 3.9% amongst MSM in KL
- Higher HIV prevalence appears to exist in saunas then in gay bars and clubs
- Significant level of misinformation and risk behavior within the community
- Illicit drugs and alcohol use common
- Safe-sex educational materials or condom distribution not currently possible at these venues
- Internet dating common