

CHARACTERISTICS AND SEXUAL RISK BEHAVIOURS OF MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM) WHO USE CELL PHONES AND INTERNET TO SEEK MALE SEXUAL PARTNERS IN CHENNAI, INDIA



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Background:

- ❖ In India, HIV prevention interventions among MSM typically involve outreach at places where MSM meet other MSM to socialise or identify sexual partners (cruising sites).
- ❖ However, the increasing use of cell phones and the Internet may be shifting the way MSM are meeting sex partners.
- ❖ We examined the extent of use of cell phones and Internet among MSM to seek male sexual partners and their characteristics.

Methods:

- ❖ Between August and September 2011, a survey was conducted on mental health and risk behaviours of MSM accessing the cruising sites and drop-in centres of two community-based organizations in Chennai.
- ❖ We analysed the socio-demographic and other characteristics of MSM who reported using cell phones and/or Internet (websites, chat rooms and social dating networks), and condom use in anal sex.

Results:

- ❖ Participants' (n=154) age ranged from 19 to 60 years (Mean: 32.1).
- ❖ About four-fifth (81.8%; n = 126/154) reported having used a cell phone and one-tenth (12%; n = 20/154) have used Internet (chat rooms/social dating network).
- ❖ The type of technology reported by MSM (n = 128) to seek male sexual partners were:
 - ✦ cell phone - 96.8% (n = 124/128)
 - ✦ chat room - 10.1% (n = 13/128)
 - ✦ social dating network - 4.6% (n = 6/128).
- ❖ Among MSM who reported using Internet and/or cell phone to seek sexual partners:
 - ✦ 70% (n = 90/128) were less than 35 years and had completed high school;
 - ✦ 49% (n = 63/128) identified as kothis (feminine/receptive), 20% (n = 25/128) as double-deckers (insertive/receptive), and 14% (n = 18/128) as bisexual; and
 - ✦ 12% (n = 15/128) self-reported as HIV-positive.
- ❖ Among those who reported having ever had anal sex, about one-fifth (21%; n = 27/126) did not use condom in the last anal sex; 85% of these MSM (n = 23/27) used cell phones and/or Internet to seek partners.

Conclusion:

- ❖ A high proportion of MSM use cell phone and Internet to seek male sexual partners, thus introducing avenues for cell phone/Internet-based outreach and educational interventions.
- ❖ Further research is needed to understand differences in the sexual risk behaviours of MSM with their male sexual partners who are met through cell phone/Internet versus traditional cruising sites.

Table 1. Characteristics of study participants (N=154) based on their use of technology (or not) to meet male sexual partners

	Total sample (n=154)	Ever used technology* (n=128)	Never used technology (n=26)
Mean age (SD)	32.1 (8.5)	31.8 (8.4)	33.5 (9)
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Age			
19-25	35 (23)	28 (22)	7 (27)
26-35	73 (47)	64 (50)	9 (35)
36 & above	46 (30)	36 (28)	10 (39)
Education			
Illiterate	3 (2)	2 (2)	1 (4)
Less than high school	50 (33)	36 (28)	14 (54)
High school or more	101 (66)	90 (70)	11 (42)
Marital Status			
Never married	109 (71)	89 (70)	20 (77)
Ever married	45 (29)	39 (31)	6 (23)
Sexual Identity			
Kothi	74 (48)	63 (49)	11 (42)
Double-decker	28 (18)	25 (20)	3 (12)
Bisexual	20 (13)	18 (14)	2 (8)
Gay	7 (5)	6 (5)	1 (5)
Others	15 (16)	16 (13)	9 (35)
HIV status			
HIV-positive	16 (10)	15 (12)	1 (4)
HIV-negative/unknown	138 (90)	113 (88)	25 (96)
Ever had anal sex with a man			
No	28 (18)	21 (16)	7 (27)
Yes	126 (82)	107 (84)	19 (73)
Sexual risk in the past month			
Inconsistent condom use during anal sex with a male partner	37 (29)	32 (30)	5 (26)
Sexual risk during the last anal sex encounter			
Unprotected sex with a male partner	27 (21)	23 (22)	4 (21)
* Cell phone, Internet & Social Dating Networks			