Risk Behavior and HIV Prevalence among Men who have Sex with Men in a predominantly Muslim and Multi-Ethnic Society: A Venue-Based Study in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The objectives of this sentinel research were to find HIV prevalence, associated risk behavior, and level of knowledge of transmission methods among men who have sex with men in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

DESIGN: An adaptation of venue-day-time-sampling (VDTS) was applied to identify venues where men congregate for the purpose of meeting or soliciting sex from other men. Three clubs, two massage parlors, eight saunas, and one park were selected. A total of 517 men were enrolled into the study. Data collection included a self-administered risk behavior questionnaire and an oral rapid HIV test.

RESULTS: The majority of respondents were Malays (47%) and Chinese (43.7%). Twenty tested HIV-positive (3.9%). One in four respondents reported having more than five male partners in the last six months. Those who had unprotected sex with a casual partner (44.9%) were almost 3 times more likely to be HIV positive compared to those who did not (OR=2.99; 95% CI 1.13 – 7.90; p=0.027). Those who were receptive partners in unprotected sex (27.9%) were also more likely to be HIV positive (OR=2.71; 95% CI 1.10 – 6.54; p=0.030). Men who reported having had group sex (33.3%) had increased risk of HIV infection (OR=3.95; 95% CI 1.55 – 10.09; p=0.004). 16.1% had sex with a female partner in the past six months.

CONCLUSIONS: Risk behavior is widespread among MSM in Kuala Lumpur, but because of stigma and legal restrictions, the provision of HIV education is often lacking or ineffective. This must change in order to prevent the further spread of HIV in this community.