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Sexual Risk Behaviour of Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) in an Urban Society of West Sumatera Province of Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aim: The cases of HIV/AIDS have increased in Indonesia in the last decade, especially in Padang Municipality of West Sumatera Province. The cases are consistency higher in high risk population groups, including men who have sex with men (MSM). The study exmanines sexual behaviour of MSM, which becomes a potential risk of HIV transmission.

Method: We have conducted a qualitative research by interviewing 44 MSM and three HIV/AIDS prevention commissioners and two health workers. The data was analyzed using content thematic analysis approach, which presented narratively and semi-quantitative features.

Result: The result shows that most of MSM are very sexual active and have multi sex parners. On the contrary, most of the sexual contacts are unprotected with low consistency of condom use. They also have limited knowledge of HIV/AIDS and lack of awareness of its transmission. Voluntary of HIV testing is very low due to personal and access barrier, such as feeling shameful to be recognized by other people and perceive healthy and free from HIV/AIDS risk.

Conclusion: The sexual behavior of MSM becomes a potential risk of HIV transmission. Our findings indicate that there is a need of improvement of health promotion to decrease the risk of HIV transmission, including health education and special access to HIV testing to reach this community.

Keywords: Sexual behavior, MSM, HIV/AIDS

Introduction

The cases of HIV/AIDS have increased significantly in Indonesia over the last two decades.¹ In Province of West Sumatera especially, the cases have also increased within the last five years.² Even, the cases rate was higher in the province than a national rate, which was 24.04 compare to 19.1 per 100.000 inhabitants in 2015. Among districts and municipalities in the province, Padang municipality, the capital city of the province has the highest number of the

cases, which consisted more about 50% of the HIV cases in the province were in Padang.

National Comission of HIV/AIDS Prevention of Indonesia also reported that HIV/AIDS cases consistently higher in high risk population groups, such as sex wokers, MSM and injecting drug users (IDU). The data show that the cases of HIV/AIDS more than 5% in those group.³ Specifically, the Comprehensive Surveillance Biological Behaviors in Indonesia reported that the HIV/AIDS cases increased in the MSM groups by 7% within five years, which was 5% in 2007 became 12% in 2011.⁴ Many studies suggested that MSM is a potential risk of HIV transmission.⁵⁻¹⁰

Province of West Sumatera is well-known as a religious society in the country, which predominantly belong to Moslem faith and Minangkabau ethnic. Superficially, the society strictly prohibits MSM practice. On the contrary, the Comission of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Department

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of Health of Padang Municipality reported that there was significantly increase of MSM in the area,^{11,12} which was recorded less than 300 in 2012 and more than 1,500 in 2017.¹² This study aimed to explore the behavior of MSM that became risk of HIV transmission. The study also explored how the MSM perceive on their social norm and values towards their behavior.

Method

The study has been conducted in Padang Municipality, the capital city of West Sumatera Province of Indonesia. The data was collected between June and September 2018. We used a qualitative study design by interviewing 44 MSM, three HIV/AIDS prevention commissioners and two health workers. We obtained MSM from the information of HIV/AIDS preventions commissioners and as well as snow ball from the previous participant. These participants were chosen base on appropriateness and adequacy principles by using data sources triangulation approach.

A qualitative inquiry was very relevant with the problem being investigated and the objectives of the study because the problem is hidden and taboo in the society. Also, the phenomana of the problem being studied was not clearly understood previously. A thematic framework analysis was used to analyze the data and to draw the conclusion.

Result

The main participants of the study, MSM distribute across all occupation and level of education, with the youngest 16 years and the oldest 46 years. Interestingly, about half of them have high education, who has graduated or currently a student at a university. Their occupations vary from laborer, driver, students, and employee.

In average, our participants admitted that they have been as MSM for about 4.77 years, with 13 years as the longest. Most of them is relatively sexual active with the frequency of sexual contact 2.7 times a week. They also tend to have multi sex partner with 2.05 in average (see table 1), with nearly half of them admitted having two or more sex partners concurrently.

Table 1: Descriptive features of MSM sexual behavior

Variables	Min.	Maks.	Mean (\pm SD)
Length as MSM (year)	0.7	13	4.77 (2.70)
Number of partner (people)	1	5	2.05 (1.49)
Weekly Sexual Contact (times)	0.5	15	2.75 (3.05)

However, most of the sexual contact is unprotected, with only on third of them use condom consistently. Even, about 6.82% of them never use it (table 2). Information from participants reveals that there are various reasons that they don't use condom. They do not use condom because of sexual plessure reasons and access to condom [P9, 11, 12, 17, 26, 29, 31]. As mentioned by the participants:

"I don't use condom sometimes, ...what we are lookin for in sexual contact is a pleasure, ... if we use condom, in some extend will minimize the aim" [P11].

"We don't always use condom, because we don't always have it. Sometimes I can buy it, sometimes I get it from HIV prevention volunteer. If want to by it I feel ashame..." [P12].

Additionally, some of them do not use condom because they believe that they are free from any risk of diseases transmission if they see that their partner is

healthy and do ot have any symptoms of any diseases, such as HIV/AIDS or genital diseases [P11, 18, 26, 29, 33, 41].

"I think we don't always need to use condom, because I trust my partner, he is only with me... and I see him doesn't have any diseases. I am safe" [11].

"Ya... we use condom, but not always... you know..., we know our body, we wknow our partner, we don't have a disease that can transmit to each other" [P29].

Table 2: Condom use and HIV testing among MSM

Variable		f (n-44)	%
Condom Use	Consistent (Always)	17	38.64
	Inconsistent (Sometimes)	24	54.54
	Never	3	6.82

Conted...

Having HIV Test	Yes, within the last 12 months	9	20.45
	Never	35	79.55
HIV Status	Positive	2	4.54
	Negatif	7	15.91
	Unknown	35	79.55

Despite they say that they and their partner healthy and free from diseases transmission including HIV, majority of them (79.55%) do not really know their HIV status because they never been done a HIV test. The participants explained that there are various factors hinder them to do HIV test. Although they know that they can have a test in health centers and hospitals in Padang municipality, they are reluctant to do so. Similar reason for not using condom, they do not have a test because they perceive that they are healthy and nothing to worry about because they do not feel any symptoms of the diseases.

Few of them, also explain that do not have a test because feeling shameful to be recognized by other people. They perceive that the stigma from public is very strong, which will undervalue them [P17, 18, 24, 31, 35]. As mentioned by the participant:

"I cannot do a test in health centers... people will recognize us, you know there is a stigma, that people think that a man who does HIV test is a prostitute customers or MSM. I am afraid my identity to be revealed" [P24].

Dicussion

Most of MSM in Padang Municipality of West Sumatera Province do not aware of the HIV risk, in which they do not eager to have the test. Voluntary of HIV testing is very low due to personal and access barrier, such as feeling shameful to be recognized by other people and perceive healthy and free from HIV/AIDS risk.

Our study also reveals that there are two factors that become risks of HIV/AIDS transmission, namely multi sex partners and inconsistence condom used.

Multi Sex Partners: Our study indicates that MSM tend to have multi-sex partner, which indicates that they are very sexual active. Our study is similar to Cempaka and

Kardiwinata (2012)¹³ in Bali, that reported about 77.8% of MSM had multi sexual partner. The study by Nugroho (2012)¹⁴ in Jakarta Timur even reported that multi-sex partner within MSM as high as 78.1%.

Our study reveals that MSM is relatively very sexual active, which also related to their young age. In average, they have sexual contact 2-3 times weekly (43.2%). The study indicates that same sex partner is mostly intended for having sexual contact instead of intimate personal psychological relationship.

Inconsistence of Condom Used: Despite the MSM are very sexual active and had multi-sex partner, the consistent condom used was very low (38.6%). Our finding is also similar to study in Bali, which was only 37.8%, as reported by Cempaka and Kardiwinata.¹² The rate of condom used is not very much different to National Report of Commission of HIV/AIDS of Indonesia, which mentioned about 36%.¹¹ Even, in Dominica,⁶ where anti HIV/AIDS campaign was slightly better, the consistency of condom used among MSM only reached 43%.

This finding indicates that with most of HIV status of our participants are unknown (79.55) that could be positive, may lead to a substantial risk of HIV/AIDS transmission among MSM community, in addition to low consistent used of condom.

Lack of Knowledge and their perception of HIV/AIDS influence them to use condom with their intimate partner. They perceive that they are healthy and free from the risk of the diseases when they do not have any symptoms. They are very reluctant to use condom because their main desire to have MSM relationship are mostly for sexual pleasure. They explained that using condom are very unpleasant and will hinder them to gain their aim. The study is also confirmed by Rokhmah dan Khoiron study¹⁵ on MSM community in Jember of East Java Province, where the consistency used of condom is very low due to similar reason. Herlani *et al*⁵ also reported the condom use by MSM was not a priority, because the same sex behavior is as a sexual adventure for gaining sexual pleasure for them.

Both sexual risk behaviors, multi sex partners and inconsistence condom used have been also a global concern as HIV/AIDS transmission.^{8,9,16} In China, for example, there has been a growing trends of HIV epidemic among MSM in all Chinese provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. The MSM

were also very sexual active, which approximately 90% of them had anal and oral sex within the past six months of the research time. They also had low condom used due to the preference of better sexual sensation, which was only 19.9% with their regular intimate partner and 30.4% with noncommercial casual partners.¹⁷

Conclusion

The study reveals that MSM sexual behavior become risks of HIV/AIDS transmission, which lack of knowledge and awareness of the disease. Most of their HIV status is unknown, where they are reluctant to do a voluntary testing. The consistency of condom used is also very low due to their perception of the disease and their sexual willingness. On the contrary, the MSM are very sexual active with their regular and casual sex partners, in which they tend to have multi sex partners.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Clearance: Formal permission was obtained from the Board of Nation and Public Protection of Padang Municipality. The participants (MSM) were voluntary invited to participate in the study, and they were informed that their participation would remain anonymous.

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