

**Reaching male and transgender sex worker communities in Pakistan:
addressing public and private identities**

M. Collumbien¹, N. Jaafry², A. Qureshi², R. Verma³

¹London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Epidemiology and Population Health, London, United Kingdom, ²Consultant, Islamabad, Pakistan, ³International Center for Research on Women, New Delhi, India

Background: Pakistan's National AIDS Programme has recognised male and transgender sex workers as separate target groups for interventions and recent epidemiological data confirmed their key importance in Pakistan's HIV epidemic. Currently interventions are limited to NGO outreach on HIV prevention. Contextual data are needed on the existing social organisation and heterogeneity within these groups to galvanize effective interventions.

Methods: Peer ethnographic research (PEER) was used, training 15 TGs and 15 MSWs to interview their peers on social life, risks, problems and health. We use data from in-depth interviews with peer interviewers, briefs of their own peer-interviews and observational data of the training and analysis workshops. Findings are triangulated with results from a subsequent bio-behavioural survey among 900 MSWs and TGs.

Results: The training workshop with the TGs revealed that this group is tightly organised around common TG identity within a hierarchical community led by gurus. Strict normative responses were evident in group trainings and interviews, contrasting with more complex and fluid identities emerging in private in-depth interviews disclosing more 'traditional male' roles, desires and sexual practices. Rigid TG norms may corroborate wider Pakistani societal norms in increasing the vulnerability of this group. The MSW consist of 2 distinct groups - khotki (feminised males), and banthas (with male gender identities). Although distinct, khotki identity, social organisation and vulnerabilities overlap more closely with TGs. Both groups relate antagonistically to banthas who are more difficult to reach, large in number and currently neglected. The survey confirmed that the 3 groups have distinct risk profiles.

Conclusions: Urgent scale-up of prevention efforts for diverse groups of male and transgender sex workers both calls for, and warns against the pitfalls of, community development interventions. Identities may be more complex and diverse than publicly portrayed when different interest groups start competing for funds.

Presenting author email: martine.collumbien@lshtm.ac.uk