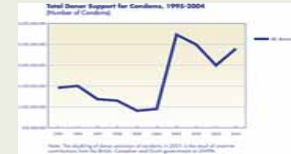


Constructs of identity and HIV risk behaviours among men who have sex with men (MSM) in two South African cities



Allanise Cloete,¹ Laetitia Rispel,²
Vasu Reddy¹ & Carol Metcalf¹

¹ Human Sciences Research Council,
Cape Town & Pretoria, South Africa

² Centre for Health Policy, School of Public Health,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

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Background & Motivation for the JEMS



Johannesburg



eThekweni

Men's

Study

JEMS...

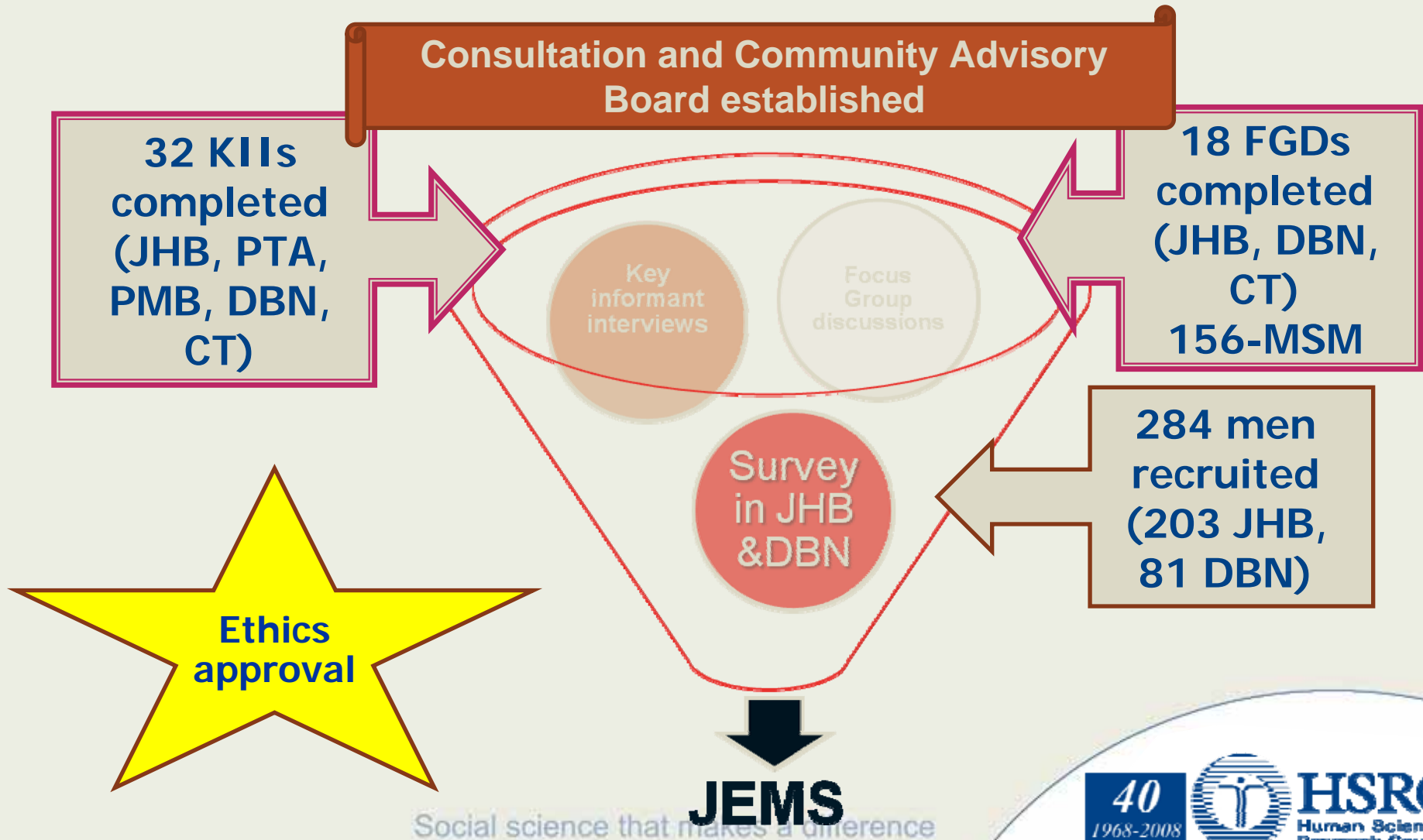
Background

- The *National Strategic Plan on HIV & AIDS and STIs, 2007–2011* of South Africa (NSP) states that:
 - *“there is very little currently known about the HIV epidemic amongst MSM”*
- Part of a broader study on the prevalence of HIV and risk behaviours among MSM in two South African cities,
- Explored constructs of identity, sexual relationships and the social and cultural context of HIV transmission and risk-taking behaviour.

Motivation for the Study

- Understand the social and cultural context for HIV risk

Methods



Results: Constructs of identity and HIV risk behaviours among MSM

- **Recurring issues of KIIs & FGDs included:**
 - I. Constructs of Identity
 - Self-acceptance of identity
 - No singular notion of what it means to be gay
 - Constructs of bisexual behaviour
 - II. The influence of socio-cultural norms and family on identity of MSM
 - III. HIV risk behaviours

I. Constructs of Identity

- Various terms used to 'categorise' MSM
 - Terms that connote hidden sexual relationships between men – *after nines, cupboardy*
 - Other terms have been socially constructed around notions of self-identification as gay, and to MSM who are *out of the closet* – *stuzana, moffie, stabane, faggot*

Self-acceptance of identity

- *I'm a gay man. I'm queer. I'm a moffie.*
(Participant, HIV positive group, Cape Town)
- *It does not matter about other people actually. I am a gay person.* (Participant, FGD, Soweto)
- *I would say gay; we are gay men only interested in men.* (Participant, Doornfontein FGD, Johannesburg)
- *You do not touch women if you are gay. You only want men, because I do not want to touch a woman, not at all. I want a man in my life. That is how it is, you see.* (Participant, Westbury FGD, Johannesburg).

No singular notion of what it means to be gay

- *The perception in the Muslim community had always been of the moffie you know, the typical stereotype queer, effeminate, drag queen type of, you know, thing, and not realising that there is a whole spectrum of people and different expressions of sexuality in different states and forms.* (Participant, Muslim FGD, Cape Town)
- *I do not think all gay people are effeminate. If you are talking about males who are effeminate, there are very many straight males who are not gay at all, who are very effeminate. So the point is, it is this old thing of stigmatisation or what you call typing people. You cannot say that you do not look like a teacher, or you do not look like a mother. I mean, what does a mother look like? What does a gay person look like?* (Participant, FGD, Doornfontein, Johannesburg)

Constructs of bisexual behaviour

- Interestingly, even though participants defy singular, reductionist views of being gay, many held negative perceptions of MSM who engage in bisexual behaviour:
 - *I think they are mostly confused, if they are anything else but gay* (Participant, gay village, Greenpoint, Cape Town)
 - *What I can say is an explorer. That means you sleep with other men but you don't want to identify yourself as gay.* (Participant, Soweto FGD, Johannesburg)
 - *We refer to them as after nines. We also refer to them as vultures and scavengers.* (Participant, Happy and Proud FGD, Johannesburg)

II. The influence of socio-cultural norms and family on identity

- **Socio-cultural norms and value systems:**
 - *I think that certain cultures do not have the same acceptance of MSM for instance in the Xhosa culture we might find that there is less acceptance of people who gay identify. I think that the stigma that happens there is everything from minor discrimination to major violent assault.* (Key informant, CT)
 - *In my experience and in my generation, is that it was very difficult to be yourself. In school, it was difficult to be a young teenage boy. You need to be exactly like a boy and not be otherwise. You know, there was name calling and everything like that.* (Participant, Muslim FGD, Cape Town).

III. HIV risk behaviours

- Misinformation about the modes of transmission and the risks associated with different sexual behaviours
 - *In fact, if I remember correctly, it seems as though it's easier for a man to get HIV from his female partner than it is from a male partner.*
(Participant, Banana Boys FGD, Durban)
- Men may be well-informed about the risk of HIV infection, but still engage in risky sexual practices
- Use of alcohol & drugs with sex
- Multiple sex partners

In conclusion...

- MSM identities are not only widespread but also diverse in South Africa
- Understanding the social context of risk for MSM is important when designing HIV prevention programmes and services, in order to meet the needs of individuals with diverse sexual behaviours in a non-discriminatory and non-judgmental manner.
- More in-depth ethnographic type of research is needed to understand risk taking behaviour of MSM

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THANK YOU

**ANY
QUESTIONS??**

Contact e-mail address: acloete@hsrc.ac.za

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