

Research Article



SEXUAL BEHAVIOR, KNOWLEDGE LEVEL, AND CONDOM USE AMONG MSM AND TRANSGENDER COMMUNITIES IN BAUBAU CITY

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ABSTRACT

Background: The MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) and transgender communities are key populations at high risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS. This vulnerability is driven by risky sexual behaviors, low consistency in condom use, as well as stigma and discrimination that hinder access to community-friendly healthcare services. Empirical data on these issues in Baubau City remain limited, making this study essential to provide a comprehensive overview.

Methods: This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey method with a cross-sectional approach. The sample consisted of 60 respondents, including 54 MSM and 6 transgender individuals, selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring knowledge of HIV and STIs, risky sexual behaviors, and condom use. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis.

Results: The majority of respondents engaged in risky sexual behaviors, with 63% having more than one partner in the past six months, 92% having practiced anal sex, and 55% having engaged in transactional sex. Although 66.7% of respondents demonstrated a high level of knowledge about HIV and STIs, there remains a significant gap between knowledge and safe sexual practices. Consistent condom use during anal sex was reported by only 30% of respondents, and the use of water-based lubricants was similarly low.

Conclusion: Risky sexual behavior remains prevalent among MSM and transgender communities in Baubau City despite relatively high knowledge levels. Condom and lubricant use is still inconsistent. Comprehensive education interventions, improved access to condoms and lubricants, and strengthened community-friendly healthcare services are necessary to promote safer sexual behaviors.

Keywords: Sexual, Condom, MSM, Transgender, HIV

INTRODUCTION

Sexual and reproductive health is a fundamental human right and plays a critical role in ensuring individual and community well-being. Globally, vulnerable groups such as men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender individuals remain disproportionately affected by sexual health challenges, particularly the risk of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The latest data from UNAIDS (2022) indicate that over 70% of new HIV infections in the Asia-Pacific region occur among key populations, notably MSM and transgender people. This alarming statistic underscores the pressing need for targeted interventions to address sexual health disparities within these communities.

The heightened vulnerability of MSM and transgender populations is shaped by complex interplays of behavioral, social, cultural, and structural factors. Risky sexual behaviors such as having multiple concurrent sexual partners, engaging in unprotected anal intercourse, and participating in transactional sex are prevalent within these groups and significantly elevate the risk of HIV and STI transmission. Compounding these risks are pervasive social stigma, discrimination, and marginalization, which create barriers to accessing healthcare services and accurate health information. Such barriers not only restrict preventive behaviors but also contribute to deteriorating mental health, further influencing sexual decision-making.

Furthermore, gaps in knowledge about HIV prevention, STI risks, and safe sex practices including consistent condom and water-based lubricant use persist despite the availability of information. While health education is pivotal, knowledge alone is insufficient to foster behavioral change when social norms, power dynamics in sexual relationships, economic vulnerabilities, and

peer influences continue to exert substantial pressure on individuals' choices.

In the Indonesian context, specifically in Baubau City, data on the sexual behaviors, knowledge levels, and condom utilization among MSM and transgender populations remain limited. This scarcity of empirical evidence hampers the development of effective, culturally appropriate interventions tailored to the local context. Consequently, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of sexual behavior, knowledge regarding sexual and reproductive health, and condom usage patterns among MSM and transgender individuals in Baubau City.

The findings of this research are expected to inform the formulation of evidence-based policies, the design of community-centered health education programs, and the strengthening of inclusive healthcare services that address the unique needs of key populations. Additionally, this study aims to contribute to national and global efforts in mitigating the spread of HIV and STIs through strategic, evidence-driven, and sustainable interventions. By enhancing understanding of the behavioral and knowledge dimensions within these communities, this research aspires to support the advancement of public health initiatives that uphold equity, inclusivity, and the right to health for all.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research employed a quantitative descriptive survey design with a cross-sectional approach to systematically describe the levels of knowledge, sexual behaviors, and condom use among MSM (men who have sex with men) and transgender individuals in Baubau City.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of all MSM and transgender individuals in Baubau City. Based on data from IAKMI SULTRA, there are approximately 914 MSM and 14 transgender individuals identified in the area. Sampling was performed using a purposive sampling method combined with snowball sampling to reach respondents who were actively engaged in sexual activities, aged 18 years or older, and willing to participate in the study. Total of 60 respondents participated, comprising 54 MSM and 6 transgender individuals.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which included frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations to map the prevalence of risky behaviors, knowledge levels, and condom use patterns. This was complemented by literature comparison to interpret findings within broader public health contexts.

RESULTS

This study involved 60 respondents from the MSM and transgender communities in Baubau City, consisting of 54 MSM (90%) and 6 transgender individuals (10%). The majority of participants were aged 25–34 years (48.33%), followed by 18–24 years (38.33%), and ≥35 years (13.33%). Most respondents had a high school education (63.33%), with the remainder having a diploma/undergraduate degree (30%) and junior high school or lower (6.67%).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Identity		
MSM	54	90 %
Transgender	6	10 %
Age		
18 – 24 years	23	38,33 %
25 – 34 years	29	48,33 %
≥ 35 years	8	13,33 %
Relationship Status		
Not in relationship	7	11,67 %
Reguler partner	36	60 %
Multiple sexual partners	17	28,33 %
Education Level		
Junior high school or below	4	6,67 %
High school	38	63,33 %
Diploma/Undergraduate	18	30 %

Sexual Behavior

Sexual behaviors were significantly prevalent among respondents. 100% of participants had engaged in sexual activity, 92% reported practicing anal sex, 63% had more than one sexual partner in the past six months, and 55% admitted to transactional sex (sex in exchange for money or goods).

Table 2. Sexual Behavior Patterns

Behavior	Yes (%)	No (%)
Ever had sexual intercourse	100	0
Ever had anal sex	92	8
More than one partner in the last 6 months	63	37
Ever engaged in transactional sex	55	45

The results showed that the majority of respondents engaged in high-risk sexual behaviors. A total of 63% admitted to having

more than one sexual partner in the past six months, 55% had received money or goods in exchange for sex, and 92% had engaged in anal sex.

Transactional sex emerged as a significant concern. According to Putra and Puspitasari (2019), transactional sex among transgender individuals in urban areas is influenced by economic needs, community norms, and social pressures. Similar findings were reported by Safika et al. (2018), who stated that poverty and socioeconomic inequalities drive both transgender and MSM communities to engage in paid sexual activities.

Table 3. Frequency of Sexual Activity in the Past Month

Frequency	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Never	6	10
1–3 times	26	43,3
4–6 times	16	26,7
>6 times	12	20

There 20% of respondents reported having sexual intercourse more than six times per month. This high frequency of sexual activity may increase the risk of contracting other STIs such as syphilis, gonorrhea, and genital herpes, as highlighted in the study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019).

Knowledge about HIV and Condom Use

Table 4. Knowledge Level on HIV and Condom Use

Knowledge Level	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	4–5	40	66,7%
Moderate	3	12	20%
Low	0–2	8	13,3%

The study found that 66.7% of respondents had a high level of knowledge about HIV and STIs, particularly regarding modes of transmission, condom use, and the availability of healthcare services. This indicates that the MSM and transgender communities in Baubau City have relatively adequate access to information on HIV prevention.

This finding is consistent with research by Fauk et al. (2021), which revealed that MSM communities in Indonesia generally possess a high level of knowledge about HIV transmission, especially among those who are active within their communities or frequently interact with outreach workers. Similarly, a study by Maharani et al. (2020) stated that increasing community-based education can enhance knowledge and awareness of HIV prevention among key populations.

However, 13.3% of respondents were still categorized as having low knowledge. This group tended to be unaware that HIV can be transmitted by individuals who appear healthy or did not understand the importance of using water-based lubricants during anal sex. According to Guntur and Raharjo (2018), low knowledge levels are often associated with lower educational attainment and limited exposure to health information. Condom and Lubricant Use.

Table 5. Condom and Lubricant Use Patterns

Practice	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Condom use during anal sex	30%	20%	25%	15%	10%
Use of water-based lubricants	25%	20%	28,3%	16,7%	10%
Keeping condoms available	43,3%	25%	16,7%	10%	5%
Asking partner to use a condom	36,7%	20%	26,7%	10%	6,6%
Refusing sex without a condom	18,3%	21,7%	31,7%	13,3%	15%

Most respondents understood the importance of condom use, only 30% consistently used condoms during anal sex. This gap between knowledge and practice is commonly referred to as the "knowledge-behavior gap." According to Mustanski et al. (2015), psychosocial factors such as partner pressure, overreliance on the perceived safety of steady partners, and the influence of alcohol or drugs can reduce the consistency of condom use.

Self-control in refusing sex without a condom was also low, with only 18.3% of respondents having ever refused sex when a condom was not used. A study by Closson et al. (2014) reported that the bargaining power to insist on condom use is often lower among transgender individuals due to stigma, experiences of violence, or economic dependence.

Furthermore, lubricant use was also suboptimal, with only 25% of respondents always using lubricants during sexual activity. In fact, according to WHO (2016), water-based lubricants are essential to reduce the risk of injuries that can increase the potential for HIV transmission.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the

persistence of high-risk sexual behaviors among MSM and transgender communities in Baubau City, despite a generally high level of knowledge regarding HIV and STI prevention. The data reveal that while 66.7% of respondents demonstrated high knowledge about HIV transmission, condom use, and access to healthcare services, only 30% consistently used condoms during anal sex. This reinforces the existence of a knowledge-behavior gap, where awareness does not necessarily translate into safe practices.

This gap is consistent with findings from Mustanski et al. (2015), who argued that psychosocial factors such as partner dynamics, trust in steady partners, and the use of alcohol or drugs significantly influence sexual decision-making and reduce condom use consistency. In the Baubau context, these factors may be compounded by cultural and social pressures within the community, further hindering the translation of knowledge into behavior.

The prevalence of transactional sex, reported by 55% of respondents, reflects economic vulnerabilities that are also noted in prior studies. Putra and Puspitasari (2019) and Safika et al. (2018) identified poverty and socioeconomic disparities as key drivers of paid sex engagements among MSM and

transgender individuals in urban settings. These economic factors can diminish individuals' negotiation power in sexual encounters, particularly in insisting on condom use, thereby increasing exposure to HIV and STIs.

Moreover, the ability to refuse sex without a condom remains notably low, with only 18.3% of respondents having ever done so. This finding aligns with Closson et al. (2014), who found that transgender individuals often face reduced bargaining power due to stigma, experiences of violence, and economic dependence, limiting their capacity to assert safer sex practices.

The study also revealed that the use of water-based lubricants was inadequate, with only 25% of respondents consistently using them. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) emphasizes that water-based lubricants are crucial in preventing microtears during anal sex, which can facilitate HIV transmission. The lack of consistent lubricant use indicates a gap in both resources and education regarding comprehensive safe sex practices.

In summary, the results suggest that while educational outreach has improved knowledge levels in Baubau City, structural and psychosocial barriers continue to impede behavior change. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that combines education with interventions targeting economic empowerment, stigma reduction, and improved access to condoms and lubricants. Additionally, empowering individuals within these communities to enhance their negotiation skills and self-efficacy in sexual health decisions is essential to reducing the incidence of HIV and other STIs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the MSM

and transgender communities in Baubau City remain highly vulnerable to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections due to persistent high-risk sexual behaviors. Although the majority of respondents possess a high level of knowledge regarding HIV transmission and prevention, this has not been consistently translated into safe sexual practices. Condom use during anal sex remains low, lubricant use is inadequate, and the ability to negotiate safer sex practices is limited, especially among transgender individuals.

The existence of a knowledge-behavior gap highlights the need for comprehensive interventions that go beyond education alone. Efforts must address psychosocial and economic factors, including reducing stigma, enhancing access to condoms and lubricants, and empowering individuals through negotiation skills and self-efficacy in sexual health decisions. Strengthening community-based health services that are inclusive and friendly to key populations is critical to reducing the spread of HIV and STIs in Baubau City.

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