Sexual identity does not predict sexual behaviour
Exploring the sexual networks of men who have sex with men and women in two urban centres in South East Asia – Vientiane and Hanoi
Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia

FINDINGS
• Men who report bisexual behaviour are not homogenous in sexual orientation, identity, or behaviour; the choice of their sexual partners does not necessarily correlate with their sexual orientation, and almost none of them identify as being bisexual.
• Men who report bisexual behaviour have more partners and report riskier sexual behaviours than men who report exclusive homosexual or heterosexual behaviour.
• Homosexual and heterosexual networks are not mutually exclusive; men who report bisexual behaviour may link these sexual networks.
• Some women who report only a few sexual partners are linked into extensive networks of men who have sex with men who engage in high-risk behaviour, placing these women at potential risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS
• Develop new approaches to provide sexual health education to bisexual men whose identity is heterosexual: traditional communication methods that currently target gay and transgender men, such as drop-in centres, fashion and lip synch shows, may not be effective for these “gender-normative” men.
• Conduct further research to test the feasibility, acceptability and effectiveness of alternative media, content and delivery of sexual health education targeting behaviourally bisexual men.
• Prevention education programs for ALL young people should emphasise the need to ALWAYS use condoms when they have casual sex – either vaginal or anal – no matter the gender of partners.

WHY DID WE DO THIS STUDY?
According to the Asian Epidemic Model, male-male sex will account for up to 50% of new HIV infections in Asia by 2020.
A further 20% of new infections will be in women who currently do not engage in high-risk behaviours, mostly married women infected by their male partners, some of whom will have been infected during male-male sex.
In South East Asia, HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men is much higher than in the general population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>HIV Prevalence in Men who have Sex with Men</th>
<th>HIV Prevalence in General Population</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>28.8% (2008)</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>0.8%-8.7%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.9-8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1.5%-9.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>15-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>17%-31% (2007)</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>12.1-22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>5.3%-9.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>10.6-18.8</td>
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Studies in South East Asia have found that between 7% and 21% of young men engage in same sex behaviour, much higher than the 2-3% found in studies in Australia, the US, and Europe. For example, a survey of a randomised sample of more than 35,000 21-year-old Thai military conscripts, presented at the International AIDS 2012 Conference in Washington, found that 7% had had sex with a man, and that 83% of those 7% identified as heterosexual.
KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS
What are the characteristics of sexual networks of men who have sex with both men and women in Vientiane and Hanoi?
What is the potential of these men to transmit HIV to their various sex partners (male and female) through engaging in high-risk behaviour?
How does the sexual risk behaviour of men who have sex with men and women differ from men who have sex with men only – the traditional target of sexual health education and services for men having sex with men?

RESEARCH METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Vientiane: 73 bisexual men</th>
<th>Hanoi: 96 bisexual men</th>
<th>Timeline for data collection</th>
<th>Research Team</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Materials</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>November 2009 – January 2010</td>
<td>August – November 2010</td>
<td>2 teams (male only) – 1 moderator and 2 note takers</td>
<td>Pair-wise ranking; Mapping exercise; Kinsey scale; Semi-structured interview; Focus group discussions</td>
<td>Question guides</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Vientiane: 189 males, 84 females, 25 transgender</td>
<td>June – Early October 2010</td>
<td>4 males, 2 females</td>
<td>Modified respondent-driven sampling - questionnaire interview</td>
<td>Questionnaires: 1 set for female; 1 set for male and transgender respondents</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hanoi: 190 males, 48 females, one transgender</td>
<td>Late November 2010 – May 2011</td>
<td>5 males, 3 females</td>
<td>Interviewed by using handheld computers (PDAs)</td>
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FINDINGS
Within the networks linked with the behaviourally bisexual seeds in Vientiane, almost 50% of the male partners identified as exclusively heterosexual, while 48% of male participants reported bisexual behaviour during their lifetime. In Hanoi around 60% of male participants identified as bisexual or predominantly homosexual, while almost 80% reported bisexual behaviour.

DESCRIPTION OF MALE PARTICIPANTS’ LIFETIME PARTNERS

VIENTIANE

HANOI

Vientiane
Men reporting bisexual behaviour had a higher median number of female partners (5) in the previous 12 months than men reporting exclusive heterosexual behaviour (3) and their combined (male + transgender) partners were equal to the number of male partners of homosexual men (5).

Hanoi
Men reporting bisexual behaviour had a higher median number of female partners (4) in the previous 12 months than men reporting exclusive heterosexual behaviour (2) and a higher median number of male partners (7) than men reporting exclusive homosexual behaviour (2). Those homosexual men who had transgender partners (n = 4) had a median of five partners.
CONDOM USE
Overall consistent condom use was low, especially among bisexual active men (15-20%). It was highest among participants who reported exclusively heterosexual behaviour in Vientiane (27%) and exclusively homosexual behaviour in Hanoi (35%).

SEXUAL NETWORKS
The Vientiane sample contained males, females, and transgender members. The link between the two largest networks was a man reporting one male and one female sex partner.

The Hanoi sample had few females and only three transgender people. The link between the two largest networks is a male reporting two female sex partners.

SUMMARY
• Men who report bisexual behaviour are not homogeneous.
  - They do not identify as “bisexual”
  - Most identify as heterosexual
  - They have sex with men for many different reasons
• Men who report bisexual behaviour have more partners and report riskier sexual behaviours than men who report exclusive homosexual or heterosexual behaviour.
• Overall, consistent condom use is low in all types of participants and with all types of partners – bisexual and heterosexual men were no more likely to use a condom during anal than vaginal sex.
• Programs should make no assumptions about men’s sexual behaviours and should not assign men to inflexible categories such as homosexual or heterosexual for targeting of health information and services aimed at preventing HIV and STI infection.
• Prevention education programs for ALL young people should emphasise the need to ALWAYS use condoms, no matter the gender of partners, when they have casual sex, either vaginal or anal.

Research partners
Centres for International Health and Population Health, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia; Vientiane Capital Health Department and Centre for HIV, AIDS and STIs, Ministry of Health, Vientiane, Lao PDR; Vietnamese Community Mobilisation Centre for HIV/AIDS Control, Hanoi, Vietnam; Kirby Institute, The University of NSW, Sydney, Australia; National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

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