



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Illustrated Depiction of Self-Concept and Risky Sexual Behavior among Men who have sex with men in Makassar, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

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Background: The sexual behavior of men who have sex with men (MSM) is closely linked to their self-concept. Self-concept is an organized collection of beliefs and perceptions about oneself. A person's sexual self-concept can be an underlying factor for engaging in various behaviors, particularly sexual behaviors. Additionally, sexual self-concept can predict certain sexual cognitions that contribute to risky sexual behaviors. This study aims to explore aspects of self-concept, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, sexual behavior assertiveness, and sexual communication assertiveness, in MSM and their association with risky sexual behavior, illustrated through visual depictions by an illustrator. This qualitative study uses a descriptive approach and thematic analysis, with in-depth interviews conducted with 10 informants. Findings indicate that some MSM feel sexually satisfied through non-penetrative acts such as kissing, hugging, and masturbation. However, others report satisfaction through anal sex, oral sex, various intimate acts, including rimming and fisting, and by changing sexual partners. Regarding sexual self-efficacy, some MSM believe they are capable of engaging in safe sexual practices; however, one informant expressed uncertainty about his skill in correctly using condoms. The assertiveness in sexual behavior and communication observed among all MSM indicates their ability to assertively communicate and act on their sexual desires. Nonetheless, some MSM informants continue to engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as anal sex, oral sex, fisting, rimming, non-penetrative petting, and frequent partner changes. While some informants demonstrate that their sexual self-concept can guide them away from risky sexual behaviors, there remains an MSM individual who doubts his capacity to consistently practice safe sex, leading to a continued tendency toward risky sexual behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals' daily social interactions bring various influences, including on sexual orientation. In Indonesia, homosexual individuals still often face stigma and discrimination, especially due to the strong eastern culture that tends to view homosexuality as foreign and deviant (Nugraha, 2023). The term homosexual was first introduced in 1869 by Weeks (1977), defining sexual attraction or relationships between people of the same sex, such as between men and men or women and women. However, in the public health realm, the terms "Men who have sex with men" (MSM) are more commonly used, regardless of the sexual identity of people in this group. The CDC (2021) categorises all men who engage in sexual acts with other men as MSM or MSM, without labelling them as homosexual or gay (Aditya, 2012). The MSM population is a major concern in global HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. According to the UNAIDS report (2021), 21% of new HIV

infections are among MSM worldwide. By 2022, HIV prevalence among key populations including sex workers, injecting drug users, transgender people, and prisoners will be higher than the general population, with HIV prevalence among MSM recorded at 7.5% (UNAIDS, 2023). MSM in Indonesia have a 28-fold higher risk of contracting HIV than men in the general population, mainly due to high rates of unprotected anal and oral sexual intercourse, which risks wounding and increases exposure to infection (Goldstone & Welton, 2004). HIV transmission is also fuelled by the high frequency of multipartnering among this group, which increases the risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (Shalihah, 2016).

In Indonesia, data from the Ministry of Health (2023) shows an increase in the number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) among MSM. In 2020, around 18% of all HIV cases were dominated by MSM. This figure rose to 27.5% in 2022, and 29% in 2023, consisting of 27.7% MSM and 1.1% waria. This shows a consistent and worrying upward trend in HIV infection among MSM in Indonesia. South Sulawesi province, particularly Makassar city, also showed a significant increase in new AIDS cases, where in 2021 there were 327 AIDS cases, and in 2022 new AIDS cases in South Sulawesi reached 629 (MOH, 2023)(Kesehatan, 2023).

Makassar city as a metropolitan centre has been impacted by globalisation, leading to lifestyle changes and an increase in social phenomena, including the presence of MSM. However, there is still a high level of stigma towards the sexual behaviour of MSM in society, which considers this behaviour to be against religious and cultural norms, and calls it a form of deviance (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This stigma negatively impacts the mental well-being of MSM and discourages them from accessing necessary health services, even for HIV/AIDS prevention (Saurina Mariany et al., 2019). This stigma also causes MSM to hide their sexual identity, which creates challenges for public health programmes in reaching this group.

Research shows that stigma can affect MSM's self-concept and encourage risky sexual (Goffman, 1963). Self-concept refers to an individual's perception of their identity, including their beliefs, values and feelings about themselves. In a sexual context, sexual self-concept includes an individual's perception of his or her sexual orientation and behaviour (Sullivan et al., 2006). Sherkman (2020) found that homosexual men often have a lower physical self-concept and a more negative sexual self-image than heterosexual men. Other studies have shown that low sexual self-concept can promote risky sexual behaviour as individuals have a tendency to engage in behaviours that may harm themselves (Hsu et al., 2015; Sepúlveda-Páez et al., 2022).

In Makassar city, social stigma and discrimination faced by MSM often lead to strong psychological effects, such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Revaldi & Rachmawati, 2020). According to research by Fabiola et al. (2016), MSM in Makassar often internalise societal stigma related to homophobia, which causes them to feel unwelcome and isolated, affecting their self-concept and triggering risky behaviours (Fabiola et al., 2016). This negative impact of social pressure and rejection of self-identity can also increase MSM's tendency to hide (Seran & Riwu, 2022).

To understand how the self-concept of MSM in Makassar relates to risky sexual behaviour, this study adopts a self-concept visualisation approach through Picture Illustration. Visual representation through picture illustration enables the depiction of MSM's self-concept related to their sexual orientation and behaviour, thus providing a deeper understanding of how MSM perceive and value themselves (Patria, 2014). This kind of visualisation is able to present information concretely, helping individuals and communities understand complex phenomena, including the emotional aspects and self-perceptions of MSM in facing the challenges of stigma (Witabora, 2012).

The adoption of the illustrative method in this study aims to avoid verbal bias and capture the essence of MSM self-perception, thus enabling a more accurate mapping of self-concept and risky sexual behaviour among MSM in Makassar. In addition to providing a clearer understanding, the results of this study are expected to be used as a medium for health promotion, especially to reach MSM groups that tend to be

difficult to reach in traditional health programmes (Patria, 2014). The Makassar city government and relevant health agencies can use these results as a reference in designing more effective intervention policies, as well as creating a more inclusive environment for MSM to access health services.

This research is not only relevant for academics, but also for health practitioners and policy makers, as well as the MSM community who want to better understand the influence of stigma on their mental health and sexual behaviour. By understanding the self-concept of MSM and the factors that influence their behaviour, intervention efforts to reduce risky behaviour and promote social acceptance can be better targeted.

METHODS

Type of Research

This study is a descriptive qualitative research that aims to understand the self-concept of MSM related to risky sexual behaviour in Makassar City. This method was chosen to explore the phenomena, processes, perspectives, and sexual views of the MSM informants involved. This descriptive qualitative research produces narratives that describe the sexual self-concept of MSM, which are then represented in the form of visual illustrations (picture illustration) to provide a more in-depth picture of their experiences and self-perceptions.

Place and Time of Research

The research was conducted in Makassar City, South Sulawesi, with the main location at Yayasan Gaya Celebes (YGC), a non-governmental organisation on Jl. Andi Jemma Inspection Canal number 50, Mamajang Sub-district, Bonto Lebang Village. YGC was chosen because it is the centre of LGBT assistance in Makassar and focuses on HIV-AIDS in South Sulawesi. The foundation was established in 1992 and has assisted more than 5000 MSM. The research took place from February to March 2024.

Research Informants

a. Informant Selection Technique

A *snowball sampling* technique was used, involving MSM assisted by YGC as well as those not assisted by other organisations. Informants consisted of MSM with a sexual orientation towards men (MSMO) and those who are attracted to both men and women (MSMW). In addition to MSM, interviews also involved the director and field coordinator of YGC to obtain additional information on the sexual behaviour of MSM.

The director of YGC was the first informant who then recommended the field coordinator and several MSM. Other informants were obtained from the recommendations of previously assisted MSM. Before meeting, the researcher confirmed the informant's consent to the presence of the illustrator. If permitted, the illustrator was present during the interview to capture visual information as a reference for illustrating the informants' sexual self-concept.

b. Informant

The total number of informants was 10, consisting of 7 YGC-assisted MSM, 1 nonassisted MSM, 1 YGC director, and 1 YGC field coordinator.

Informant	Total
YGC-assisted MSM	7 people
YGC's non-admitted MSM	1 person
YGC Director	1 person
YGC Field Coordinator	1 person
Total	10 people

c. **Research Instruments**

The instruments used in this study include:

1. **Interview guide:** Contains questions on sexual self-esteem, sexual self-efficacy, behavioural assertiveness and sexual communication.
2. **Voice recorder** (mobile phone).
3. **Camera** for documentation.
4. **Drawing stationery:** HVS paper, pencil, eraser.
5. **Image illustrator:** Abnia Misliah Zahrah, a selected illustrator who depicted the interview results in visual form to present the self-concept of MSM.

d. **Data Collection Technique**

Data were collected through *in-depth* interviews using the *in-depth* interview method. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that explored MSM's sexual self-concept in relation to self-esteem, self-efficacy, behavioural assertiveness, and sexual communication in the face of sexual risk.

Data Collection Matrix

Informant	Information Obtained	Data Collection Technique	Instrument
MSM Informant	Sexual satisfaction and confidence, assertiveness of sexual behaviour and communication, risky sexual behaviour	<i>In-depth Interview</i>	Interview guide, drawing stationery, recording device
YGC Director and Coordinator	MSM confidence building programmes, education to prevent risky behaviour, efforts to control safe sexual behaviour	<i>In-depth Interview</i>	Interview guide, voice recorder

e. **Research Procedures**

The research began with an orientation to the YGC location, followed by in-depth interviews according to location agreements with informants. The data collection process went hand in hand with the illustrator's drawing of illustrations, depending on the informant's consent. Information obtained from the interviews was documented, then analysed and represented in the form of illustrations.

f. **Data Measurement and Analysis**

Data measurement used source triangulation by comparing data from the YGC director and coordinator. Data were analysed using thematic analysis which grouped data based on similar themes. The themes analysed included sexual self-esteem, sexual self-efficacy, behavioural assertiveness, and sexual

communication assertiveness. The data was then interpreted and presented in the form of a narrative, then represented through visual illustrations.

g. Research Ethics

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University (Number: 353/UN4.14.1/TP.01.02/2024). This study considered the following ethical aspects:

- **Informed consent:** Providing informed consent to the informant that includes the purpose of the study and assurance of data confidentiality.
- **Anonymity:** Informants' identities are disguised by using initials in the research documentation.
- **Confidentiality:** The data and information provided by the informants are guaranteed confidentiality and confidentiality.
- will not be disseminated to other parties outside the research.

RESULTS

Characteristics and Illustration of Informants' Self-Concept

The informants in this study were 10 people, consisting of 5 MSM and 1 informant of the founder of the foundation and 1 informant of the field coordinator of Yayasan Gaya Celebes. In detail, information about the informants can be seen from the following table:

Table 3. Informant Characteristics

No.	Initials	Age	Jobs	Status	Duration of Assisted Time
1	RJ	31	Private	YGC MSM	4 Years
2	SS	36	Private	YGC MSM	2 Years
3	Y	29	Private	YGC MSM	3 Years
4	D	49	Private	YGC MSM	8 Years
5	JA	26	Private	YGC MSM	5 Years
6	MK	48	Private	YGC MSM	8 Years
7	A	30	Private	YGC MSM	1 Years
8	AS	34	Private	MSM are not YGC's mentees	-
9	AA	56	Private	YGC Director	-
10	SA	47	Private	YGC Field Coordinator	-

Source: Primary Data 2024

1. RJ Informant

RJ, a 31-year-old MSM (men who have sex with men) under YGC guidance since 2020, has both steady and casual same-sex partners. Growing up with divorced parents, RJ began same-sex relationships in high school, becoming sexually active in Makassar. Now a role model, RJ manages risky behaviours responsibly.



Image. 1 Illustration of Informant RJ (Illustrator)

RJ, who identifies as MSM and has never been with a woman, values emotional intimacy, finding satisfaction through hugging and kissing. To prevent risky behaviour, he prioritises condom use and firmly declines unwanted sexual activities, including fisting, rimming, and BDSM, openly communicating his desires with partners.

2. Informant SS

SS, a 36-year-old MSMW under YGC guidance since 2022, has both steady and casual same-sex partners. Previously married due to family arrangements, he hid his orientation from his wife. After trauma in high school, he engaged in same-sex relationships, finding normalcy in his identity and supporting others in health awareness.

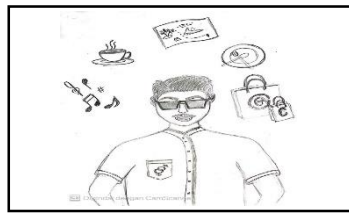


Image. 2 Illustration of Informant SS (Illustrator)

SS, an MSMW, enjoys shopping, travelling, dining at renowned restaurants, relaxing at cafes, and listening to music. He receives financial support and gifts from a generous long-distance partner. Describing himself as stylish yet indifferent to others' views on his sexuality, SS embraces his identity confidently.



Image. 3 Illustration of Informant SS (Illustrator)

SS, an ODHIV and bisexual, wears a red ribbon symbol and has both male and female partners. He enjoys intimacy through hugging, kissing, and rimming, consistently using condoms to prevent STIs. SS firmly declines condomless activities and partners showing STI signs, openly communicating his boundaries with partners.

3. Informant Y

Y, a 29-year-old MSM, has had a steady male partner and is unmarried. Traumatized by childhood abuse, Y became involved in same-sex interactions through social media in high school and remained active while working in Makassar. He sees same-sex relationships as against his principles but has gained sexual health awareness through YGC guidance, helping him avoid risky behaviours.



Image. 4 Illustration of Informant Y (Illustrator)

Y is deeply committed to his same-sex partner, symbolised by an image of them holding soil with a sapling, reflecting awareness of their identity and a desire to reconnect with traditional sexual norms. He finds satisfaction in hugging, kissing, and occasional masturbation while avoiding anal sex and other risky behaviours. Y consistently uses condoms and PrEP for safety and firmly communicates his boundaries, including rejecting BDSM.

4. Informant D

D, a 49-year-old MSM without a steady partner, has been under YGC guidance since 2016. Experiencing childhood abuse and an authoritarian upbringing, D left home at 19, moving to Makassar. He engaged in same-sex relationships while working at a supermarket and hides his orientation from family. D views his identity as normal.



Image. 5 Illustration of Informant D

D enjoys cool climates like Malino and views sex as a basic need, allowing life to proceed once fulfilled. He fantasizes about outdoor sex in the mountains, followed by leaving his partner abruptly, symbolising his preference for fleeting connections. D likens himself to the wind, emphasising his aversion to lasting relationships.



Image. 6 Illustration of Informant D

D, a mature MSM with a talent for makeup and a feminine demeanour, finds satisfaction in anal sex, favouring outdoor settings in cool mountain landscapes. He prioritises safe practices, consistently using condoms and rejecting undesirable activities like oral sex or condomless encounters. D clearly communicates his sexual boundaries with partners.

5. Informant JA

JA, a 26-year-old male categorized as a man who has sex with men and women (MSMW), has been under the guidance of YGC since 2019. He does not have a steady same-sex partner and is currently in relationships with women who are unmarried. JA's parents divorced when he was two years old, leaving him with a perceived lack of paternal affection. Since 2017, JA has actively participated in anti-drug and HIV/AIDS ambassador competitions as well as male modeling contests in Makassar. In 2020, he began

experiencing same-sex attraction, influenced by exposure to a permissive social environment and a need for paternal affection during a period of personal hardship. Only a few of his family members and acquaintances are aware of his sexual orientation. JA has faced stigma from peers, who expressed disappointment in his orientation, considering it a waste of his physical attractiveness, labeling him as irrational, and associating him with religious condemnation. Despite this, JA views his identity as an MSMW as a valid expression of diversity in sexual orientation.

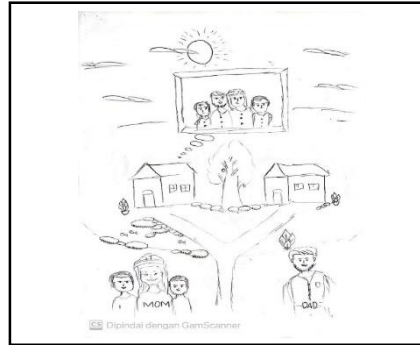


Image. 6 Illustration of Informant JA

Explained that he considers himself a victim of his parents' divorce. He has always longed for a father figure in his life and continues to hope that one day his parents will reunite, despite the improbability of this since his father has remarried. JA stated that the divorce left him with a lack of affection, particularly paternal love. This void contributed to his involvement in a permissive social environment and influenced his decision to identify as a man who has sex with men and women (MSMW). According to JA, engaging in relationships with older same-sex partners allows him to fulfill his longing for the paternal affection he missed. Furthermore, information about JA's sexual self-concept was illustrated based on the findings from the interview.



Image. 6 Illustration of Informant JA

JA views himself as a victim of his parents' divorce, which left him longing for paternal affection and hoping for their reconciliation, despite its improbability due to his father's remarriage. He attributes his lack of paternal love to his involvement in permissive social circles and his eventual identification as a man who has sex with men and women (MSMW). JA explained that relationships with older same-sex partners provide a sense of paternal affection that he feels he missed during his upbringing. His sexual self-concept is further illustrated in Figure 15, based on the interview findings.

6. Informant MK

MK is a 48-year-old man who falls into the category of men who like men (MSM) as well as having an attraction to women (MSMW). Since 2016, he has been mentored by YGC. MK has a permanent same-sex partner despite being married and having children. An experience of sexual harassment by a sports teacher in junior high school sparked a curiosity that led him to be active in same-sex relationships until now, without the knowledge of his wife and children. Only a few family and relatives are aware of his sexual

orientation. MK has been offended when called 'bencong' by close relatives, but as an MSM, she feels her relationship is as natural as a woman who is loved by a man.

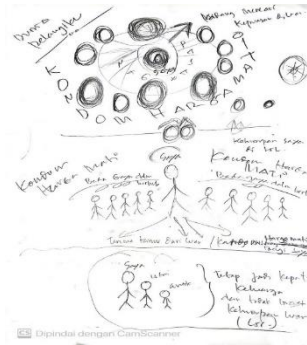


Image. 7 Illustration of Informant MK

MK has a primary same-sex partner, but also engages with other men for sexual satisfaction outside of his main relationship. Despite having multiple sexual partners, MK is consistent in using condoms with all of them, considering condom use essential. Although he has numerous same-sex partners, MK prioritizes his family above all else and assumes full responsibility as the head of the household. However, when outside the home, he occasionally neglects to think about his family. MK experiences varying levels of sexual satisfaction with each partner. His sexual self-concept is further illustrated in the interview results.

Based on the interview results, MK is portrayed as having two distinct sides to his life. The "bright side" represents his role as a responsible head of the household, living with a wife who is unaware of his sexual orientation as a men who have sex with men (MSM). On the other hand, MK also leads a life within the LGBTQ+ community, engaging in multiple sexual relationships as an MSM. He views sexual satisfaction as being achieved through anal sex. To prevent sexually transmitted infections, MK consistently uses condoms during sexual activities, considering it a personal obligation. He firmly rejects unwanted sexual activities such as fisting, rimming, or any sexual acts without condom use. Additionally, MK openly communicates his sexual desires to his partners.

7. Informant A

A is a 30-year-old MSM who has been mentored by YGC since 2024. A has a permanent same-sex partner and a single marital status. Since high school, A has only been attracted to the same sex due to promiscuity and social media abuse. A first had same-sex sexual intercourse with a teacher in the second year of high school. When his family found out about his sexual orientation, A was kicked out because he was considered a disgrace to the family. For A, being an MSM is normal, just like heterosexual couples.

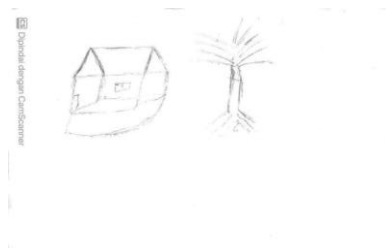


Image. 8 Illustration of Informant A

A revealed that his MSM identity was discovered by the extended family, which led to A being kicked out of the house. The experience left a lasting impression, and A was determined to prove that as an MSM, he could also succeed. A has a steady partner who loves him but also engages in sex with other MSM partners,

including sex parties such as threesomes and foursomes. A seeks sexual gratification through various variations, including rimming, fisting, anal sex and oral sex. To prevent sexually transmitted diseases, A now consistently uses condoms, despite previously low condom adherence due to lack of knowledge and access. A rejects unprotected sexual activity and expressly communicates her wishes to sexual partners.

8. Informant AS

AS is a 34-year-old man who identifies as a man who has sex with men and women (MSMW). He has a same-sex partner and is divorced with a child. His first same-sex experience occurred after high school, was influenced by depression and peer pressure, and was exacerbated by an incident of abuse involving a relative. Although only a few family members know about his sexual orientation, AS does not deny it when questioned. He faces societal stigma but believes his orientation is wrong.



Image. 7 Illustration of Informant AS

Based on Illustration 7, AS likens himself to a stone, symbolising his stubbornness and resistance to being controlled by anyone, including his parents. He expresses a strong desire for autonomy in making decisions, particularly regarding his sexual orientation and behaviour as a man who has sex with men and women (MSMW). The rainbow in the illustration signifies his identity as part of the LGBT community. AS prefers to remain silent in the face of unpleasant treatment or comments about his sexual orientation, choosing to live fluidly, like water flowing in a river. Further insights into AS's sexual self-concept are depicted in Illustration 8.

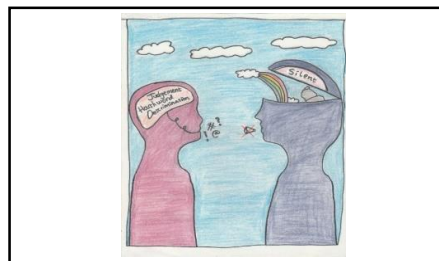


Image. 8 Illustration of Informant AS

Based on the interview results, AS is illustrated with two silhouettes facing each other: a purple silhouette representing AS as a man who has sex with men and women (MSMW) and a pink silhouette representing a non-MSMW individual. AS believes his sexual satisfaction is fulfilled through oral sex and consistently uses condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections. If condoms are not used, he prefers to engage in non-penetrative sexual activities. He firmly rejects unwanted sexual practices like rimming and clearly communicates his sexual desires and boundaries to his partners.

9. Informant AA

AA is the 56-year-old director of YGC. AA explained that the consistency of MSM in using condoms is still not optimal. This is due to the low knowledge of the MSM community, the suggestion that if they use

condoms it will be difficult to reach climax when they have not used condoms at all before. However, for MSM who feel that condoms are a necessity, they will consistently use condoms.

10. SA informant

SA is a 47-year-old field coordinator of YGC. SA explained that in preventing risky sexual behaviour, MSM are often provided with capacity building training on HIV-AIDS and STI information as well as meetings to increase self-confidence. In addition, *outreach* training and capacity building are also conducted to train the *skills of MSM*.

Sexual self-concept in MSM

In this study, the main focus is on sexual self-concept, which includes various dimensions relevant in the context of risky sexual behaviour. The three dimensions identified are sexual self-esteem, sexual self-efficacy, and assertiveness of sexual behaviour and communication. Each dimension provides deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions of individuals who identify as MSM (Men who have Sex with Men).

Sexual Self Esteem

Sexual self-esteem refers to an individual's judgement of the sexual satisfaction felt in their sexual activities. The results showed that MSM expressed satisfaction through various forms of sexual activities, including kissing, hugging and masturbation. The informants revealed that their satisfaction comes from intimate physical experiences, as said by RJ (31 years old) who mentioned satisfaction in making out. Another informant, D (49 years old), explained the deeper satisfaction derived from anal sex and oral sex, noting that anal experiences were important in her sexual satisfaction.

Variations in sexual activities, such as fisting and rimming, were also recognised by some informants who preferred to explore with more than one partner at a time. These sexual activities show how individuals within the MSM group have different approaches to fulfilling their sexual desires, with some opting for more conventional forms and others being more open to more extreme variations.

Sexual Self-Efficacy

Sexual self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about their ability to behave safely sexually. In this study, MSM demonstrated strong beliefs in their ability to maintain safety in sexual relationships. They actively use condoms and lubricants, and consider using PrEP to prevent sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV. Informants such as SS (36 years old) and Y (29 years old) emphasised the importance of checking the health status of their partners before engaging in sexual intercourse, demonstrating a proactive approach in maintaining their sexual health.

Some informants also indicated that they prefer to make out without penetration as a safer alternative, while one informant, AS (30 years old), expressed doubts over the ability to engage in safe sexual behaviour, given the uncertainty over her partner's health. Despite the doubts of some individuals, the majority showed a high level of confidence in safe sexual behaviour, driven by an awareness of the importance of protection.

Behavioural Assertiveness and Sexual Communication

In the behavioural assertiveness dimension, MSM demonstrate resistance to unwanted sexual activities. They are bold in expressing their boundaries and desires to sexual partners, ensuring that their sexual

experiences fulfil personal expectations and comfort. This reflects a good understanding of their own needs and the importance of communication in sexual relationships.

The overall findings suggest that individuals in the MSM group have complex understandings of sexual self-esteem, sexual self-efficacy, and the importance of clear communication in relationships. Efforts to increase awareness and knowledge about sexual health are crucial in improving individuals' self-esteem and confidence to lead safer and more fulfilling sexual lives. This research contributes to a broader understanding of how individuals who identify as MSM navigate their sexual world with thoughtful consideration of personal health and satisfaction.

Assertiveness of Sexual Behaviour

This research shows that MSM have the ability to resist unwanted sexual activities. This includes refusing practices such as fisting, rimming, BDSM, and having unprotected sexual intercourse. Below are quotes from informants that reflect their assertiveness:

- RJ, 31, MSMO, stated: "I refuse if it's not comfortable for me. Because everyone is different."
- D, 49 years old, expresses firmness in refusing oral sex: "I quit, it's better not to."

This information shows that MSM do not hesitate to decline roles in sexual activities that are not to their comfort level, including refusing to engage in anal or oral sex.

Sexual Communication Assertiveness

Assertiveness in sexual communication refers to the ability of MSM to clearly communicate their sexual desires and boundaries to their partners. The results showed that some MSM were successful in communicating their preferences for foreplay, duration of intercourse, and desired positions:

- A, 30, mentioned the importance of asking about a partner's preferences before engaging in sexual activity.

In addition, MSM were also able to express their boundaries regarding aggressive treatment during sexual intercourse. Some participants revealed that they do not hesitate to refuse or face coercion from their partners.

Risky Sexual Behaviour

Risky sexual behaviour includes activities that increase the likelihood of acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV-AIDS. Research findings show that some MSM engage in high-risk sexual practices, such as:

- Perform anal and oral sex, fisting, as well as rimming.
- Joining sex parties or changing partners.

For example, A, 30 years old, described an experience at an orgy that involved various risky practices, whereas D, 49 years old, admitted to having multiple sexual partners.

Summary of Findings

This study confirms that MSM demonstrate a strong ability to behave assertively and communicate about their sexual desires and boundaries. Despite such assertiveness, some continue to engage in risky sexual behaviours, which may raise health-related concerns.

Visual Representation

The findings are also accompanied by a schematic that summarises the assertiveness of sexual behaviour and communication among MSM informants, illustrating the proportion of informants engaging in various practices as well as the assertive behaviour they exhibit.

DISCUSSION

Characteristics of MSM Informants

The MSM informants in this study indicated that some of them had been victims of sexual abuse by close relatives in childhood, which became their background as MSM. Research by M. J. Brown et al. (2024) showed a higher prevalence of sexual abuse in MSM compared to the general population. MSM with a history of sexual abuse tend to experience depression more often than those without, associated with risky sexual behaviour (Bartholow et al., 1994; Werbeloff et al., 2021). Less than half of the informants experienced family disharmony, resulting in a lack of attention and affection. Research shows that a lack of family attention can motivate individuals to seek attention outside the home (Yani & Yendi, 2021).

Some MSM informants are married and have children, but still have sexual relations with the same sex. These marriages are often arranged marriages, rather than personal desires, to fulfil family expectations. This is in line with the findings of Wen and Zheng (2020) who noted that many gay men marry to fulfil parental expectations. Informants tended to hide their sexual orientation for fear of rejection by their wives and families. Research shows that disclosure of sexual orientation to family is difficult due to psychological and emotional factors (Ford & Becker, 2020; Yani & Yendi, 2021).

Regarding stigma, some informants experienced discrimination, even from close family, which limited their access to health services (Dhyah et al., 2024). Research shows that MSM often face psychological pressure from family, including rejection resulting in verbal and physical violence (Elopre et al., 2022).

Sexual Self Esteem

Sexual self-esteem is the value that individuals place on their sexual identity and acceptance of their sexual life (Danesh et al., 2011; Khamseh & Nodargahfard, 2020). This study found that MSM had varied judgements about sexual satisfaction, with some being satisfied through hugging and kissing, while others were satisfied with more risky sexual practices. Sexual-self theory states that sexual self-esteem can predict risky sexual behaviour (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). Research shows that MSM with high sexual self-esteem tend to engage in safe sexual behaviours, while those with low self-esteem are more likely to engage in risky behaviours.

Sexual activities that are considered safe such as kissing and hugging show high self-esteem, while risky activities such as anal and oral sex show low self-esteem. The results of the study are in line with Snell's (1993) findings that individuals with high self-esteem are better able to protect themselves from risky behaviours. Research shows that low sexual self-esteem among MSM is associated with low sexual satisfaction and risk of risky sexual behaviour (Myer, 2023). Body image and social attachment also play important roles in MSM self-esteem and sexual behaviour (Card et al., 2019).

Sexual Self-Efficacy

Sexual self-efficacy reflects an individual's belief in their ability to behave safely and effectively sexually (Rostosky et al., 2008; Zare et al., 2016). In the context of this study, individuals who have high sexual self-efficacy demonstrate understanding and implementation of safe practices, such as condom use and PrEP, which can reduce the risk of transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. In contrast, there are individuals who show low sexual self-efficacy, doubt their ability to use condoms correctly, and tend to change partners, increasing the risk of risky sexual behaviour. Self-system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) states that self-efficacy is related to risky sexual practices. Previous research supports this finding, showing that individuals with high self-efficacy tend to avoid risky sexual behaviours (Ahmad et al., 2024; Wet-billings & Billings, 2020; Ajayi, Olawale et al., 2019).

Assertiveness of Sexual Behaviour

Sexual behaviour assertiveness includes an individual's ability to refuse unwanted sexual acts and participate in the negotiation of sexual behaviour. This research shows that individuals can assertively reject various sexual acts that are not to their comfort, such as fisting and BDSM. This assertiveness may reduce the risk of risky sexual behaviour .

Sexual-self theory suggests that sexual assertiveness is part of sexual self-efficacy, influencing individuals' sexual practices. Research shows that individuals who are able to resist unwanted sexual activity are more likely to avoid risky sexual behaviour (Darden et al., 2019; Ford & Becker, 2020).

Sexual Communication Assertiveness

Sexual communication assertiveness is an individual's ability to effectively communicate sexual needs and desires (Kim & Choi, 2016). This study found that individuals who are able to communicate assertively about their sexual desires are more likely to avoid unwanted and risky sexual activities. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) supports the idea that communication skills influence sexual behaviour.

Research results show that individuals with good communication skills are more successful in negotiating condom use and avoiding risky sexual behaviours (Morell et al., 2021b; Cordova et al., 2022).

Risky Sexual Behaviour

Risky sexual behaviour refers to actions that increase the likelihood of negative consequences, including the transmission of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (Dadi & Teklu, 2015; Pawlowsky-Glahn et al., 2018). Research shows that although individuals have an understanding of safe sexual practices, some still engage in risky behaviours such as anal sex and changing partners.

The dual control model theory (Janssen et al., 2002) explains that the interaction between sexual arousal and sexual control influences behaviour. Individuals with high sexual arousal but low control are likely to engage in risky behaviours to meet their sexual needs (Luo et al., 2023; Paat et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study explores self-concept aspects related to self-esteem, self-efficacy, sexual assertiveness, communication, and risky sexual behaviors among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Makassar. The findings indicate a range of sexual self-esteem, with some MSM feeling satisfied with non-penetrative acts

like kissing, hugging, and masturbation, while others seek satisfaction through higher-risk behaviors, such as anal and oral sex, various styles of intimate acts, and multiple sexual partners.

Sexual self-efficacy among MSM generally shows a confidence in practicing safe sex, including condom use, lubricants, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), and verifying partners' health status before engaging in sexual activity. However, one participant expressed doubt about his ability to use condoms correctly, particularly due to frequent partner changes.

Additionally, MSM exhibit sexual assertiveness, evident in their ability to reject undesired sexual activities, such as fisting, rimming, BDSM, unprotected sex, and partners showing signs of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). They also refuse specific sexual roles, like being the receptive partner or "bottom," when not preferred. Sexual communication assertiveness is likewise evident, as MSM are able to clearly communicate their sexual desires, such as the need for affection, prolonged sexual duration, and specific forms of intimacy. They also reject uncomfortable activities, such as aggressive or coercive behaviors during sexual encounters.

Despite this awareness, some MSM continue to engage in risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected anal and oral sex, fisting, and rimming, and frequently changing partners. These behaviors are often driven by a desire for novel experiences to satisfy sexual desires. Overall, the study highlights the diversity in self-concept and sexual behaviors among MSM in Makassar, showing a balance between an awareness of sexual safety and a tendency for some individuals to engage in risky practices.

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