

A Survey of Men Who Have Sex With Men: Mainland China

To our knowledge, only 1 article has been published on the relationship in China between HIV and men who have sex with men.¹ The goal of the study described here was to provide information on this relationship.

We analyzed 426 eligible questionnaires completed in 1997 and 1998 by men from mainland China who have sex with men. Respondents' median age was 28 years, and their median education level was 13 years. Nearly one third had been married; two thirds lived in large cities, and others resided in medium-sized cities or rural areas. Of the study respondents, 71.6% self-reported as homosexual, 24.2% self-reported as bisexual, 0.2% self-reported as heterosexual, and 4.0% did not provide information on sexual orientation.

Of the 88.7% of respondents whose first intercourse occurred with men, 93.4% engaged in orogenital intercourse, 63.6% engaged in anogenital intercourse, 15.5% always engaged

in insertive anal intercourse, and 7.8% always engaged in receptive anal intercourse. Median and average numbers of cumulative sex partners were 9 and 31.6 (SD=105.6), respectively, and the average number of partners in the previous year was 3 (SD=10.9). Almost 9% of the respondents had engaged in sexual intercourse with only 1 male partner; 43.9% had had sexual intercourse with strangers when traveling, 12.7% had paid for sex, 4.9% had engaged in sex for profit, and 18.1% had participated in group sex.

In regard to female partners, 11.3% of respondents reported that their first intercourse had occurred with women, and overall 48.4% had engaged in sexual intercourse with women. Median and average numbers of cumulative female sex partners were 1 and 2.4 (SD=15.4), respectively.

Of the 302 respondents who provided information on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), 25.5% reported that they had contracted an STD. The incidence rate of STDs in the previous year was 6.8%. One respondent (2.5%) among the 40 tested was positive for HIV.

Nearly two thirds of the respondents reported that they never used condoms, and only 2 reported consistently using condoms. The most frequent reasons reported for having sex without condoms were (1) "decreased pleasure," (2) "no danger of being infected with HIV;" and (3) "my partner is healthy" (see Table 1).

Our survey indicates that in mainland China, men having sex with men are relatively active sexually. Our sample's median number of male sex partners was higher than the median of 6 reported by Carballo-Diequez and Dolezal, who conducted a survey in New York City in 1996 involving approximately 200 Puerto Rican men who had sex with men, a high proportion of whom did not use condoms.² The data described here indicate that the spread of HIV among men in mainland China who have sex with men may be faster than that seen in the 1990s in Western countries.

TABLE 1—Condom Use Among Men Who Have Sex With Men: Mainland China, 1997–1998

Characteristic	Oral Sex				Anal Sex			
	Insertive		Receptive		Insertive		Receptive	
	Use, No.	Never Use, No.	Use, No.	Never Use, No.	Use, No.	Never Use, No.	Use, No.	Never Use, No.
Age, y								
17–24	8	38	6	42	13	36	12	36
25–34	29	97	19	102	64	69	45	83
≥35	9	38	7	38	16	35*	15	33
Education, y								
0–12	11	60	7	63	22	53	14	55
≥12	35	113	25	119	71	87*	58	97*
Residence								
Big city	34	107	23	112	73	80	58	89
Small town	12	66	9	70	20	60**	14	63*
Previous same-sex partner								
Yes	39	153	27	160	85	118	65	131
No	7	20	5	22	8	22	7	21
Present same-sex partner								
Yes	29	100	22	102	63	71	52	76
No	17	73	10	80	30	69*	20	126**
Engage in coercive sex								
Yes	16	51	7	54	28	43	27	46
No	30	122	25	128	65	97	45	106
Has paid for sex								
Yes	1	23	2	21	13	17	10	16
No	45	150*	30	161	80	123	62	136
Has been paid for sex								
Yes	3	10	4	9	7	7	6	7
No	43	163	28	173	86	133	66	145

* $P < .05$; ** $P < .01$.

Half of our respondents had engaged in intercourse with women, and one third had been married, as compared with the rates of 10% and 3%, respectively, reported by Dubois-Arber et al.³ This phenomenon hints that the HIV epidemic in mainland China will spread to women who have sex with members of this subgroup of men.

The fact that little attention has been focused on men who have sex with men has severely handicapped HIV/AIDS interventions among this population. As a result, the rapid spread in mainland China of HIV among men having sex with men may continue in the foreseeable future. □

*Zhang Beichuan, MD,
Liu Dianchang, MD,
Li Xiufang, MD
Hu Tiezhong*

Zhang Beichuan and Li Xiufang are with the Affiliated Hospital of Qingdao Medical College, Qingdao, China. Liu Dianchang is with the Disease Control Center, Qingdao, China. Hu Tiezhong is with Qingdao Medical College.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Zhang Beichuan, Affiliated Hospital of Qingdao Medical College, 16 Jiangsu Rd, Qingdao 266003, China (e-mail: pytx@263.net).

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Contributors

Zhang B. directed the survey, oversaw the questionnaire design, conducted the study-related correspondence, collected the questionnaires, provided consultation, and summarized the results. Liu D. helped to design the database and conducted the statistical analysis. Li X. helped to collect and arrange the questionnaires. Hu T. helped to input data and statistics and translated the paper from Chinese into English.

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