

ISHKconnect: Internet-based HIV Prevention for Indian MSM (Men who have sex with Men)

Objectives:

The purpose of this study is to conduct formative research, identifying the HIV prevention needs of MSM who use the Internet to seek sex with men and differences in their online and offline sexual behaviour. The long-term objective of this line of research is to advance Internet-based HIV prevention interventions for MSM in India. The Internet is a rapidly emerging technology used by Indian men to meet casual male sex partners, posing a new challenge to India's HIV-prevention efforts. HST's collaborative partners on this study are India-based Tata Institute of Social Sciences and U.S.-based University of Minnesota's HIV/STI Intervention and Prevention Studies, University of Texas (UoT) and the University of California San Francisco's Center for AIDS Prevention Studies. This study is funded by NIH, and the principal investigators on this study are Dr. Michael Wilkerson (UoT) and Dr. Ashabanu Soletti (TISS). Pallav Patankar (Director HIV Programmes - HST) is the co-principal investigator.

Summary

This study supports the national priorities as outlined in National AIDS Control Program of reaching the unreached, targeting high risk groups like men who have sex with men, a subpopulation receiving the highest priority for targeted interventions with the aim of halting and reversing the HIV epidemic. We hope that findings from this study will inform prevention efforts within the national program. We propose four specific aims: (1) Document how MSM in Mumbai use the Internet to meet male sex partners and test the feasibility of conducting online focus groups to reach this population. (2) Conduct a usability assessment to determine the cultural appropriateness of an evidence-based Internet intervention for MSM in Mumbai. (3) Conduct a technology and virtual environment assessment. (4) Conduct an online behavioural risk assessment of MSM in Mumbai.

This study is currently in its data collection phase. The following are the arenas that are currently being explored to understand behaviours of MSM who use technology for seeking male sexual partners:

- In-depth interviews with health care providers (online and offline)
- Focus group discussions with MSM who use internet for seeking sex partners (online and offline)
- Online surveys with MSM who use internet for seeking sex partners
- Online interviews with technology professionals who have designed or worked toward developing mobile health interventions.