

Men and women play very different gender roles in society, and those roles are often culturally specific and vary tremendously around the world². However, men and women differ substantially from each other in terms of power, status and freedom. In virtually all societies, men have more power than women². Though their position of power in the world confers many benefits to men, it may also endanger their health¹.

Masculinity leads to expectations of men to be physically strong, emotionally robust, daring and virile². To date, patriarchal society continues to dictate traditional gender norms of masculinity. The persistent reinforcement of these norms contributes strongly to homophobia and related stigma and discrimination against men who do not meet such "masculine requirements." Further, these masculine norms are also prevalent with "men who have sex with men" (MSM). MSM describes a social and behavioural phenomenon rather than a specific group of people, which includes not only self-identified gay and bisexual men, but also men who engage in male-male sex and identify as heterosexual, trans-gendered, trans-sexual or nothing at all¹.

Men and the risk of Contracting HIV/AIDS

A number of special circumstances place men at particularly high risk of contracting HIV:

- Worldwide, men tend to have more sex partners than women, including extramarital partners, thereby increasing their own and their partners' risk of HIV¹. This places both the man's male and female partners at risk. Secrecy and stigma stifle discussion about HIV between couples.
- Current indicators suggest that globally fewer than one in twenty men who have sex with men have access to the HIV prevention and care services they need¹.
- The majority of men who have sex with men lack the necessary resources to receive HIV testing. Globally, fewer than one in twenty men who have sex with men have access to the HIV prevention and care services they need¹.
- Men who migrate for work and live away from their families may pay for sex and/or use substances including alcohol, that may impair their ability to make sound decisions, including condom use.
- Vulnerability to HIV infection increases where sex between men is criminalized¹. Thus, the risk factor of one getting caught for attempting to gain access to HIV treatment/testing as a man who has sex with men is high. Faced with legal or social sanctions, men having sex with men are either excluded from, or exclude themselves from, sexual health and welfare agencies because they fear being identified as homosexual¹.
- Male prisoners face a high risk of HIV transmission. Conditions reigning in most prisons make them extremely high-risk environments.
- Prisons are sites for illicit drug use, unsafe injecting practices, tattooing with contaminated equipment, violence, rape, and unprotected sex¹. Further, drug use on a whole, in or outside of a prison setting with contaminated equipment is cause for a rise in HIV diagnosis for the MSM community.

Male Circumcision

Circumcision may reduce men's chances of contracting HIV by up to 60 percent⁴. U.N. data suggests that male circumcision in Africa suggested that if HIV-positive men do not abstain from sex while healing from circumcision surgery, their female partners might have a higher chance of catching HIV from them⁴. These results are not conclusive, as experts believe that demonstrating the difficulties of utilizing circumcision in HIV prevention in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 60 percent of those with AIDS are women⁴.

HIV/AIDS in Canada

In Canada, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had a tremendous impact on the MSM community. At the end of 2005, an estimated 58,000 people in Canada were living with HIV/AIDS and of these, approximately 51 percent resulted from men having sex with men⁵.

At the end of 2005, MSM accounted for 76.3 percent of cumulative reported HIV/AIDS cases among adult males⁵. In 2005, MSM accounted for an estimated 45 percent of all new infections in Canada⁵.

References

1. UNAIDS. Men and AIDS – A Gendered Approach. *UNAIDS 2000 World AIDS Campaign*. 2000.
2. Greig, A., Kimmel, M. & Lang, J. *Men, Masculinities & Development: Broadening our work towards gender equality*. Gender in Development Monograph Series #10. 2000.
3. UNAIDS. At Risk and Neglected – Four key Populations. *Report on the global AIDS epidemic 2006*. 2006.
4. Associated Press. *Male circumcision may raise HIV risk for women*. Available at <http://www.cbc.ca/health/story/2007/03/07/circumcision-hiv-women.html>. Accessed October 11, 2007.
5. Public Health Agency of Canada. *Men who have Sex with Men Fact Sheet*. Available at http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/populations_e.html#men. Accessed October 11, 2007.

For more information, please call (403) 508-2500 or email info@aidscalgary.org
