Sexual Identity Crisis Of Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM) : A Case Study

Dr. M. Tineshowri Devi, Assistant professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar
Khagokpam Pramodini Devi, Ph.D Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar

Introduction
Sexual identity crisis is the main problem MSM have been encountered during their life time. The consequence of such situation is forcing them to become impairments in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capabilities. So there is lack of social acceptance of diversity in gender identities which in its turn affects an individual self-worth and functioning. It makes them reduce their mental capability and put them in the mouth of stress, depression, anxiety, worried, suicidal tendency, etc. In Manipur, MSM are not free from such tension and stress they have been looked down upon by the different other sections of population in all aspects of their life. There is no social acceptance towards MSM that lead to psychological problems in every span of their life. Thus, this paper will try to address the issues of sexual identity crisis of MSM and their human security with reference to Manipur.

Who is MSM?
'Men Having Sex with Men' or shortly MSM - is a description of a behavioural phenomenon rather than a specific group of people. It includes not only self-identified gay and bisexual men, but also men who engage in male – male sex and self-identity as heterosexual, or those sexual identity is but a part of their cultural self-identification (UNAIDS). Thus, MSM refers to behaviour, not an identity and constitute a very large, invisible population of homosexually active men present in all sections of society. In other words, MSM are defined as biological males engaging in sexual activities with other biological males.

Sexual identity crisis is the main problem they have been encountered during their life time. The consequence of lack of social acceptance in gender identities leads to affect an individual self-worth and functioning. It makes them reduce their mental capability and put them in the mouth of stress, depression, anxiety, worried, suicidal tendency, etc.

Review of literature
Sherry Joseph (2004) said that sexual identities are defined on the basis of the sexual role adopted by partners and /or the relative power between the partners which are determined by factors like economic status, age difference and the social environment in which sex takes place.

Anderson (1994) found that stigma that included fear of social disapproval, a blemish on family identity, or loss of prestige in the community, were reasons given by family members for not disclosing the sexual orientation of a relative. Herek, et al., (1998) also talk about the form of cultural and social oppression has been shown to be related to self-esteem and mental health problems. D’Augelli, et al., (1998) reveal that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who assume their families would react negatively and hide their sexual orientation from them.

Pradhan et al., (1982) noted that ‘Homosexuality was not a condemned mode of sexual gratification when the temple sculptors of Konark and Khajuraho were depicting it in stone for all posterity to see. Even though historical evidences of homosexuality existed in many of these countries were socially and / or legally not accepted. In other period and places, where homosexual love has been punished and those who practiced it have been humiliated as unnatural and abnormal.

From the above concerns, thus the researcher has attempted to look into the sexual crisis faced by MSM in the context of Manipur.

Methodology
The study is determined by case study of 40 MSM from Imphal East and Imphal West Districts of both registered and unregistered MSM (who are openly not coming out in the society). Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. The respondents were first made aware of the importance of the study and motivated. Focussed group discussion and interview schedules were used as tools of data collection for gathering in-depth information from the MSM members.

Major Findings
1. Identity crisis Vs. Social support
In Manipur, the term "gay" or "homo" has become synonymous with the term "Men having sex with men" or MSM. Many of these people have
accepted themselves with the term MSM. The findings of the study highlighted that sexual identity crisis is the main problem that MSM have encountered during their life time. There is a lack of social acceptance on diversity in gender identities, lack of social linkage, social support and expressive, or tangible that affects MSM psychologically. Socially MSM have a wide range of lack of social interaction with family, friends, acquaintance and individuals with whom they may occasionally come into contact. Such situation is putting MSM into depression, anxiety, hopelessness, worthlessness that ultimately brought their emotions into negative behaviour. In the study, it was seen that 24 MSM out of 40 MSM are coming out to the society and mingle with people and live like an ordinary people but people acceptance is very low. Such situation makes them to suppress and developed low self-esteem. It was also recognised that it was the process of stigmatisation that arises from concepts of masculinity in Manipuri culture that led to such marginalisation and social exclusion and abuse of the most vulnerable of MSM – those with feminised identities. Along with this was an understanding that social exclusion had a personal and social history that led to negative impacts on educational and employment opportunities, which, of course, increases poverty and concomitantly increases the potential for sex work activities as a source of income for self and family and a survival strategy.

2. Identity crisis Vs. Opportunities
Identity crisis uncovered lost opportunities for educational and economic advancement due to social concepts of masculinity, harassment and discrimination. It made visible the significant levels of violence targeted at such males from early childhood. It also highlighted the significant levels of suicidal impulses and self-damage of these males because of low self-esteem and self-worth. The study told a story of woe, unhappiness, despair, and a lack of hope for the future. A case is discussed below:

Bina (Name Changed): When I was young I wanted to dress up like my sister and wanted to have a long hair like her. I grew my hairs, my parents scolded me for keeping my hairs long. They cut my hairs and made me remain bald, so that I look like a man. If I happened to talk to girls, they would scold and beat me and tried to abstain from mixing up with them. They often told me ‘Nang Nupani, Nupaji lichat chatlune’. They often beat me for not behaving like a man. When I went to school, my friends would often tease me ‘nupisabi lak-e’, ‘homo lak-e’. Teachers would scold me for not behaving like a man. So I didn’t have friends in schools and at home. So, I stopped going to schools. If I happened to continue my schooling I could have got a government job by now.

3. Identity Crisis Vs. Dual role of MSM
Shanti (Name Changed): Whatever I am today, my parents should be happy because I am doing both men and women work at home and at outside. When my mother goes away for some work, she will tell me to do all household chores (like chak thongba, kon phengba, phi suba, wai teiba, etc.). Again, when my father goes away, he will ask me to look after kitchen garden (like, jotpak touba, waa yanba, invitation card piba, etc.)

Like common people, they also have own uniqueness of being human. They are getting less opportunity to show their talent and to grow up personality. At present, some of them are coming out from behind the dark room and showing their talent wherever they can. But such positive response is only for few of them. Most of them are still in dark room along with unfamiliar parent attitude and family members. Unlike other states of India, in Manipur, the existence of feminine are accepted due to the existing role of male artist who play female roles wearing female costumes (nupishabis) of the Shumang Leela group, the popular performing art form of Manipur. All the nupishabis in Shumang Lilas are often branded as 'gays'. These nupishabis are very good-looking. But these nupishabis are artistes who act out the role of women in plays, perform by all-men theatre groups. Many of them are leading a usual life with wife, children and all. In Manipur, the rooms/bars and different events like beauty/dance contests, dramas also are manned by MSM. A case is highlighted below:

Sanatombi (Name Changed): I am the eldest among brothers and sisters so I am supporting my family members with my talents and capabilities. I have two brothers and three sisters, my father is no more, mother has to look after alone my siblings. I joined sumang lila to support my family. All my earnings are spent at my family and my make-up and dresses. I have also a part and partial of a parlour. I earned hefty amount from there as well, so I could at least support my family. But I do not stay at home because I do not like my relatives. They will look at me like alien.

4. Identity crisis Vs. Sexual abuse
The study also exposed the significant levels of male-on-male rape and sexual abuse of feminised males from early childhood to adulthood. Sometime man community takes chance and traps them through their artificial love and easily fall on them because they are thirsty of love, care and
acceptance. Mainly the intention of man partner toward them is their womanly physical appearance. Some of them are living with partner for money seeks which they are used for their livelihood. Their co-stars often indulge in homosexual practices while working together. The consequence of this is to engage in risk behavior. Due to such activities many health complication problems are arising such as HIV/AIDS, STD etc. According to NACO, 2010, HIV infection data shows that 15% of HIV/AIDS is spreading through MSM in Manipur.

A case is highlighted:
Rosita (Name Changed), When I go to market, people will tease me ‘Nupi Sani Saridubu, angang pokpa yadouro’.
Thoithoi (Name Changed)
I have a male friend from my locality. I met him on the road, so I was happily calling him. He ignored me, but I kept insisting myself to talk to him but he suddenly blew with these words, Hey! you are MSM, you may be infected with HIV/AIDS. Chatlo, Yenginge. I was really shocked and depressed.
Bala (Name Changed)
I was good in dancing, so I was famous in playing Nuribi saba of Lai Harouba. After performing the dance I was going back home with some of male friends. Suddenly, we met few (around 6 of them) Assam Rifles men on the way. They molested my friends but they kept me aside and gang raped. After they finished, they threw Rs. 1000/- on my face. I was really scared and embarrassed and told my friends to keep it a top secret. After I came back home I have to sit on hot water. I could not sleep that night and cried the whole night.
Sunita (Name Changed)
He was put in a lock up for most part of a night, made to drink alcohol and then forced to have sex with security personnel.
He also had many male partners, once he was totally in love with one of his co-workers but he used me and left for another girl.
Babysana (Name Changed)
He is a mere 22 years of age but he has had more than 15 different sexual partners – all male and mostly married. He says he never used condoms earlier but once he became aware about the risks of being infected with HIV/AIDS and other STD’s, he started using them. He is not too bothered about being infected with HIV/AIDS, “I will just enjoy my life and what I do. I change partners because I know that none of them will marry me.”

Thus, Social justice, human rights and human security issues for MSM is a complex matrix of issues, concerns, and needs that reflected personal psycho-sexual histories, economics, social-cultural polices and attitudes, as well as legal concerns, that create a context for MSM, but particularly for feminised males, of low-esteem, disempowerment, and marginalisation that leads to further abuse, violence and social exclusion.

Conclusion
From the above discussion the study looked at the power inequality dynamics arising from Manipur constructions of masculinity, social attitudes towards feminised males and their sexual practices, sexual abuse, assault and rape, stigmatisation and poverty, discrimination and disempowerment. All of these issues play a significant role in the emotional, sexual, physical and economic exploitation of feminised males, and give rise to a range of physical, psychological, and emotional problems which increase vulnerability and disempowerment. And this leads to significant increases to STI/HIV infection risks. Without addressing these psychosocial concerns appropriately and with urgency, the context of human security including their identity, sexual health related promotion programmes targeting MSM would not be able to adequately develop sustainability in risk reduction and behaviour change.

Along with these personal vectors, governmental policies for combating HIV/AIDS are often in conflicts. On the one hand the government recognises the need to address the HIV/AIDS concerns of male-to-male sexual behaviours, but on the other, the continuation of the criminalisation of such behaviours often leads to threats of blackmail, sexual abuse, and violence, if not arrest. It discourages those in need of information and services to seek the same. Thus, it is necessary to understand their issues and concerns by government and create more behavioural change modification programme to common people, so that we all realise our mistakes and respecting their sexual identity.

References