

# Sexual Networking, Sexual Practices and Level of Awareness among MSM on HIV/ AIDS

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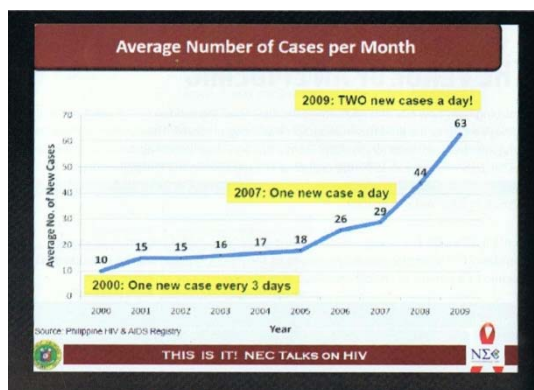
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**Abstract:** Filipinos getting infected with HIV-AIDS continued to balloon notwithstanding the intervention through comprehensive prevention, dissemination and control programs. In Eastern Visayas there were 69 cases coming from most risk population primarily Men Having Sex with Men (MSM) either homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual modes of transmissions. Bearing this epidemic, sexual networking, using the internet for sex served as cruising sites for casual sex and promiscuity maybe accounted for this surge. This study made use of descriptive cross sectional method with 214 active users from different social sites using time- location sampling through interviews, group discussions and questionnaires. Results showed that most of the respondents joined the site for sex and had an average of 1-5 different sexual intercourse for the past three months. Sexual practices were oral, anal and oral-anal. Respondents were aware on the different modes of transmission but fully unaware of existing services of the DOH and were willing to be screened for HIV.

**Keywords:** Sexual Networking, Sexual Practices, Men Having Sex with Men (MSM), Level of Awareness on HIV/ AIDS

## 1. Introduction

According to Department of Health (DOH), it is alarming that the cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) had ballooned for the past years since its discovery in 1984. It has drastically changed between 2006 and 2009 when more cases were reported annually. From 1995, the doubling time lengthened to 10 years as a result of comprehensive prevention, dissemination, and control programs. But in 2007 to 2009, the cumulative number of cases showed doubling time for only two years. In 2000, one new HIV case is reported every three days. In 2007, one new case is reported everyday and in 2009, two new cases a day.



**Figure 1:** Average case numbers per month showing the doubling effect

This increasing rate is highest among men having sex with men (MSM) in urbanized areas and among younger age groups indulging in multiple sex partners, unprotected sex, especially during anal sex and sharing needles. Together with registered female sex worker (RFSW), freelance female sex workers (FSW), injecting drug users (IDU) and overseas Filipino workers (OFW) make up the most risk populations (MARP).

In Eastern Visayas, despite the reduced presence of entertainment hubs, the cases shoot up to 69 counts merely on MSM either homosexual, heterosexual, and

bisexual modes of transmission. Despite of the intervention of the Regional Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit, of the DOH-VIII, most risk population bloomed to such number. Bearing this epidemic, sexual networking, utilizing the internet for sex served as cruising sites for casual sex and promiscuity maybe accounted for this surge. Based on my study Project DASS: A Look on Students Nightlife Practices showed that most student respondents are sexually active, wherein they use some social networking sites to hook mates called sex eyeballs (SEB) and indulge on multiple casual sex. Thus, this study aimed to validate the initial conclusions bearing that MSM as the primal most risk population in Eastern Visayas, sexual networking may be the reason for the HIV hike.

## 2. Objectives

This study deemsto answer the following problems:

- What is the profile of the respondents based on: age, sexual orientation, social status, educational attainment and occupation?
- What is the sexual networking mechanism of the respondents based on: the social network they use, reasons for joining, frequency of sexual intercourse using those sites, qualities they are looking for prospective partners?
- What are the sexual practices of the respondents based on sexual activities and condom use?
- What is the level of awareness of the respondents on HIV/AIDS based on the modes of transmission, injecting drug use and access to health services?

## 3. Method and Materials

The DOH has developed monitoring undertakings of the HIV cases in the country. According to the data, there are three systems utilized to track the disease: the National AIDS Registry (NAR), the Sentinel STI Etiologic Surveillance System (SSESS) and the Integrated HIV Behavioral Serologic Surveillance (IHBSS). In the case of the MSM, time- location sampling is used. This was also true to the study of Magnane et al (2005) and Gayet and

Fernández-Cerdeño(2009) where they used time location sampling a method. Whereas, Lemp et al., (1994) and MacKellar et al., (1996) as cited in Gayet and Fernández-Cerdeño (2009) stressed that time location sampling is recommended when all population members can be reached at certain sites at different times and where no comprehensive list (census) of the target population exists.

Members of the identified social sites within the region were sent with an invitation to come to a specific place and time. Those who respond to the invitation were given with a questionnaire to answer which will be the bases for group discussions. Other respondents were reached through social clans and via e-mails. The questionnaire is composed of four parts: the profile, sexual networking, sexual practices and level of awareness on HIV/AIDS. It was validated through series of pretesting and consultation with the DOH.

#### 4. Results

There were 214 respondents having an age range of 15-19(40%), 20-24(24%), 25-29(18%) and 30- 34(14%). Basically gay (63%) and bisexual (22%) who are college (56%) and college graduates (22%). Most of them are students but a number are young urban professionals on different fields. Social site A (94%) was predominantly used as the cruising site were most of the respondents joined the site for sex (83%) and relationships (77%). Almost all of the respondents had 1-5(82%) sexual intercourse for the last three months. They are looking for the looks (100%), body built (88%), sex appeal (74%), hygiene (72%) and good conversationalist (64%) counterparts. Sexual activities include oral (100%), anal (94%), oral- anal (72%) and group sex (16%) for some. Condom use is a minimal practice among the respondents. Mean scores of the level of awareness on HIV/AIDS showed that respondents are aware of the modes of transmission (4.6) and injecting drug use (4.3) but fully unaware (1.4) of the health services offered by the DOH.

#### 5. Discussions

Our college students are becoming more sexually active. This maybe, that they are on the period of sexual adventurism which may be influenced through peer pressure, and uncontrolled sexual urges. In some interviews with the respondents, they claim that sex is good and it made them feel better. The more they have sex with different partners the more they are looked upon by their friends. They feel that they are wanted, hot, and chased upon. Although a bulk of the respondents are consenting young adults, educated and assume positions in different institutions together with the students, they are still the most at risk population.

More so, since we are already in the computer age, anybody can access the internet, this medium had been used for such drive. There are a lot of social sites which cater sexual networking and it is designed for convenience dubbed as user friendly. All you need is to have an email and gather information to come up with a profile. Pictures are usually included, advertising your identity for easier hook ups thus a good looking member have most likely to

have multiple partners. Respondents said that they would invest much on their looks and body built to attract more mates. Unto some extent; some members will post nude pictures to do so. Chat boxes are provided for initial conversations and if they are able to develop rapport, casual sex may be next. According to respondents, some of their hook ups turned into short term relationships but it wouldn't last long for issues of promiscuity.

All of the respondents indulge into oral sex, huge of them into anal and oral-anal. Since some of the respondents were reached through social clans, some members feast on group sex. Alarmingly, respondents minimally use condoms. According to interviews, respondents don't use condoms because it is not available. They said it is expensive and they are hesitant to buy it from drugstores. Although they know that condom use is a basic protection against STI, HIV/AIDS. Still some others find it pleasurable having sex without condoms.

Respondents are aware of the modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS on the following: unprotected sex, multiple partners, blood transfusion, mother to child, micro bleeding, and precum modes of transmission. Even on negatively constructed questions such as mosquito bites, hugging and kissing, use of public toilets, seats, beddings and swimming pool indicate that they are aware of non-transmission. Whereas, injecting drug use and tattoos shows similar results. Surprisingly, when they were asked about the services offered by the DOH such as counseling, orientation, seminar, fora and alike they were fully unaware about it. They were also stunned about the free HIV screening offered by the agency and they are willing to be tested if given a chance.

#### 6. Conclusion

- a. Respondents are composed of students and young urban professionals. They use the internet for sex hook-ups, through social networks and indulge into oral, anal and oral-anal but condom use is minimal. They are aware of the modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS although fully unaware of the services offered by DOH. More so, they are willing to be screened if chances permit.
- b. Susceptibility among respondents is high on HIV transmissions. They invest much in their physique, grooming and language skills to end up in bed as this are the bases for mate matching. More so, the internet is so accessible to anybody. Website developers make it user friendly to attract membership. Sex is becoming so easy.

#### 7. Recommendations

- a. Voluntary Counseling and Testing in academic institutions would result into accessibility of most at risk populations since most are students. Universities and schools have facilities such as guidance offices and clinics could be an avenue to closely reach out the target populations.

- b. Advocacy campaign, information drive and active surveillance in the different media specially the internet be launched for continued watchfulness among most at risk populations.

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## Author Profile

**Bryan Joseph Matillano** graduated BSED Major in General Science and English from Holy Infant College in 2003. In the year 2005 he graduated MAEd Major in General Science and in 2008 Masters in English. He is working as a faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences in Leyte Normal University, Philippines.