

'UNDERSTANDING YOUR WORLD'*

FINDINGS FROM THE RAINBOW ASIAN PROJECT 2011

'BEING ASIAN & GAY
IS QUITE COMPLICATED'



Rainbow
Asian
Project

'IT'S NEVER PART OF THE CONVERSATION THAT WE GO FOR SEXUAL HEALTH TESTS'
'JUST COMING OUT CAN LEAD TO SO MANY ISSUES IN ITSELF'
'SEX DOESN'T FIT INTO ASIAN LIFE'
'IT ISN'T ALL LIKE EAST IS EAST'
'I DON'T WANT TO CHOOSE BETWEEN BEING GAY AND MY FAMILY'

FUNDED AND SUPPORTED BY



ASIAN MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR PROBLEMS WHEN COMING TO TERMS WITH SEXUAL ORIENTATION, ACCESSING SUPPORT AND THE BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO ENGAGING IN SAFER SEX



*FROM RAINBOW ASIAN PROJECT FOCUS GROUP:

Q: WHAT WOULD IMPROVE SERVICES FOR ASIAN MSM IN YOUR OPINION?

A: 'BEING OPEN TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR WORLD'.

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Executive Summary

The Rainbow Asian Project is an innovative partnership between The Lesbian & Gay Foundation and Trade Sexual Health, funded by CHAPS.

For the purposes of this report, The Project spoke to 126 people across England from a range of identities who collectively identified as Asian men who have sex with men (Asian MSM).

This report identifies some of the needs of Asian gay and bisexual men.

There were three main approaches to gathering evidence for this report: (i) Focus Groups, (ii) Survey's (both online and in person) and (iii) via a workshop session at the 14th annual CHAPS conference. Recommendations found in this report reflect many common themes.

Research conducted by Sigma Research initially identified the need for this project:

'ASIAN MSM ARE MORE LIKELY THAN ALL OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS TO CONCEAL THEIR SEXUALITY.'

'EVER HAVING TESTED IS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE COMMON AMONG BLACK (77%) AND WHITE OTHER MEN (78%) THAN IT IS AMONG ASIAN MEN (55%)'

'ASIAN MEN HAVE THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF MALE PARTNERS OVERALL.'

Sigma Research – Briefing Sheet 2 –Targeting HIV Prevention ethnicity: Priorities for MSM programmes in the UK
www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/files/GMSS-BS2-ethnicity.pdf

Sigma's research findings helped highlight the historic and current barriers faced by Asian MSM, often seen as a 'hard to reach group'.

The Rainbow Asian Project (RAP) sought to connect with Asian MSM to find out about their experiences in their own words, capturing and reflecting upon their lives. We wanted to look for a way to include Asian men at the heart of not only this project, but for other CHAPS work in the future.

In the experiences of the Asian MSM who we have talked to, one problem Asian men find when accessing support is that sometimes they don't know support services exist. Any promotion and prevention is often in the gay press or in gay bars, which some Asian men do not read or socialise in.

Some Asian gay men feel that LGB&T specialist services will not understand the problems they face in terms of culture and religious beliefs.

In addition, some Asian MSM feel they are unable to access LGB&T services or the gay scene when the services/scene often does not represent or acknowledge their culture or beliefs, or provide a visible message to say that they are part of the gay community and that services are there for them too.



The Lesbian & Gay Foundation and Trade Sexual Health, supported by the CHAPS partnership, through this project, have learned more about the needs of Asian MSM. In addition, this project has enabled and supported some Asian MSM to volunteer at CHAPS partner organisations. This ensures that Asian MSM are at the heart of services up and down the country.

In just a few short months we have met some passionate individuals that have supported this project and its future aims. It is our hope that organisations will be able to use this project report to better support Asian MSM. We believe that The Rainbow Asian Project will give the CHAPS partnership an increased understanding of effective targeted interventions for Asian MSM and wider stakeholders will have increased knowledge of the tailored prevention needs of Asian MSM.

This project has been challenging from the outset, as understanding of this under-served group is limited or based on assumptions that are often misguided. However, what soon became apparent was that “fears” about getting out there and doing the work were unfounded once the energy was put into actually “doing it”. From slow beginnings, once the word about the project started to get out into the community, there was a snowball effect. The importance of peer support and community participation lie at the heart of this project. Men became increasingly invested in sharing their thoughts and feelings about being an Asian MSM and their needs in accessing MSM services.

However, this is just the “tip of the iceberg”. More work like this is needed as it’s only with investment in this under-served group, that we will understand the issues and the full scale of the needs of Asian MSM. Asian MSM have raised some clear issues and recommendations which are explored in more detail at the end of this report.

Recommendations

- 1 TO INCREASE THE UNDERSTANDING** OF ASIAN MSM’S, CULTURAL, FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES.
- 2 TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE** ASIAN ROLE MODELS WITHIN LGBT COMMUNITIES.
- 3 TO INCREASE THE ACCESSIBILITY** AND PROMOTION OF SERVICES TO ASIAN MSM.
- 4 TO REDUCE ISOLATION**, THROUGH DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASIAN MSM TO MEET AND PROVIDE MUTUAL SUPPORT.
- 5 TO WORK WITH THE WIDER ASIAN COMMUNITY** WHEREVER POSSIBLE, TO PROMOTE POSITIVITY AND INCLUSIVITY ABOUT ASIAN MSM.

We are grateful to CHAPS for funding this innovative project.

The challenge now is to continue to develop services that best meet the ongoing needs of Asian MSM.

As you read this report, please encourage all stakeholders to consider ways in which they can put these recommendations into practice.



ROB COOKSON

Director of Programmes and Performance,
The Lesbian & Gay Foundation



SAL KHALIFA

Co-Director
Trade Sexual Health

This report is also available online at www.lgf.org.uk and www.tradesexualhealth.com

Background: The Rainbow Asian Project (RAP)

The CHAPS Innovation Fund has supported and enabled The Lesbian & Gay Foundation and Trade Sexual Health to work in partnership, to conduct innovative work with Asian Men who have sex with men.

The Rainbow Asian Project (RAP), which began in November 2010, has provided targeted engagement and information for Asian MSM.

The focus has been to deliver a small scale community based project, focused on Asian MSM.

Project Outcomes:

- 1 CHAPS PARTNERSHIP ORGANISATIONS WILL HAVE AN INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF THE NEEDS OF ASIAN MSM AND AN INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF EFFECTIVE TARGETED INTERVENTIONS
- 2 ASIAN MSM WILL HAVE AN INCREASED ABILITY TO TALK ABOUT THEIR SEXUAL HEALTH NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO NETWORK WITH OTHER ASIAN MSM FOR ONGOING SUPPORT



Introduction

THE RAINBOW ASIAN PROJECT (RAP) HAS SPOKEN TO ASIAN MEN DIRECTLY TO FIND WAYS IN WHICH THE CHAPS PARTNERSHIP CAN BEGIN TO BETTER SERVE THE NEEDS OF THESE 'HARD-TO-REACH' MEN.

From the Sigma data and the Asian MSM we spoke to, we found Asian MSM had more sexual partners in comparison to other ethnicities.

Due to cultural, religious or family beliefs, many find it difficult to 'come out' and access LGB services.

Some Asian MSM feel as though they have no-one to talk to about their issues and often fall victim to internalised homophobia, sometimes resulting in a closeted life.

Due to cultural norms and the concept of family honour, being gay or bisexual is often seen as not acceptable. Without the right access to culturally sensitive services and sexual health provision, some Asian MSM will remain hard-to-reach.

Through focus groups and ongoing discussion and support, Asian MSM were able to talk about and share their experiences, identifying what they feel are the barriers and enablers to engage in safer sex.



Methodology

Online Questionnaire and Hard Copy Survey

To gain a greater understanding of the needs of Asian MSM it was first necessary to develop a questionnaire. This was used to begin further exploration of the issues faced by this under-represented group within the LGB&T community. This was completed utilising well developed Outreach services and developing resources targeting Asian men online, via online chat rooms in gay social networking sites. Throughout the course of the project, Asian men themselves became advocates for promoting the survey both professionally and personally. This enabled the survey to reach men across the entire country. This 'snowballing' technique proved very effective in ensuring a good response rate to the survey.

Focus Groups – Hosted in Manchester & Leicester

To find out more about the needs of Asian MSM, we invited those interested from the surveys to contribute to discussions on how services could be improved to meet the needs of Asian MSM, developing points raised in the questionnaires. The level of interest was high and the amount of information received cannot be completely captured in this document. However, it is available to any CHAPS partner who would like further information from the project's findings.

Community Outreach

We were able to specifically target Asian MSM through an outreach programme. We completed sessions in gay men's saunas bringing in interpreting services. Having somebody speaking Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and Gujarati really helped engage the men in the project. In gay bars and clubs we set up stations for men to complete the surveys. We also attended local Gay Asian events to promote the online survey.

Dedicated Facebook Page

At the beginning of the project it was thought a good idea to have an online presence on Facebook to announce the project and promote the survey. The work was also heavily promoted by a range of partners, including the LGF and Trade websites.

Case Studies

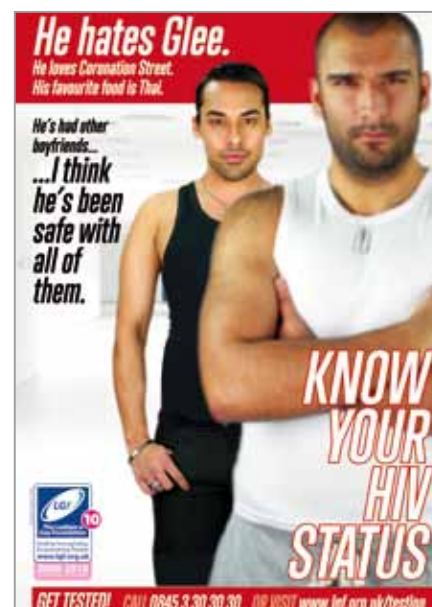
During the project a series of interviews with Asian MSM were highlighted in the LGF's magazine outnorthwest and online (at: www.lgf.org.uk/gay-asian-and-out-hash-s-story-part and www.lgf.org.uk/being-gay-muslim), to detail not only the issues of Asian MSM and sexual health but also issues unique to Asian men. These issues included personal accounts of growing up, coming out, dealing with family pressures, cultural difficulties and religious conflicts in order for Asian men to be able to identify with other gay and bisexual men who had been through, or were still going through, similar issues.

CHAPS 14

The project was outlined through a presentation and workshop session at CHAPS 14 to share findings to date and further gather evidence from those working in the field of sexual health within Asian MSM communities.

Posters & Advertisements

A poster was produced to promote the project and highlight the survey which was widely distributed by the partners and also a special HIV testing poster was trialled featuring Asian MSM.



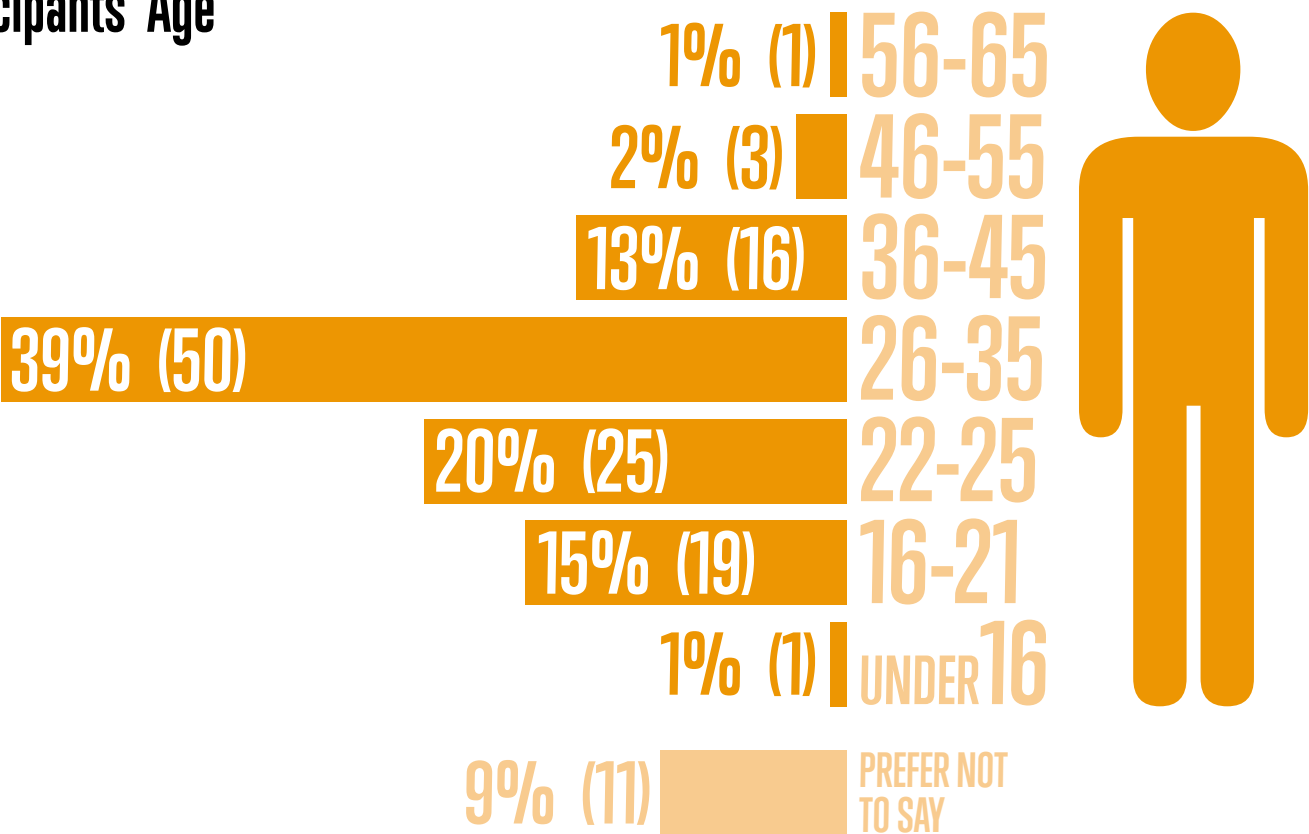
The Rainbow Asian Partnership Survey

Findings of Results

126 ASIAN MEN TOOK PART IN THE RAINBOW ASIAN PROJECT SURVEY

The questionnaire was designed to further explore the issues faced by Asian MSM. A face to face version was done using Trade Sexual Health's well developed Outreach service which encounters many Asian gay and bisexual men. The LGF also developed an online questionnaire to be promoted by partners across the country via online chat rooms in gay social networking sites.

Participants' Age



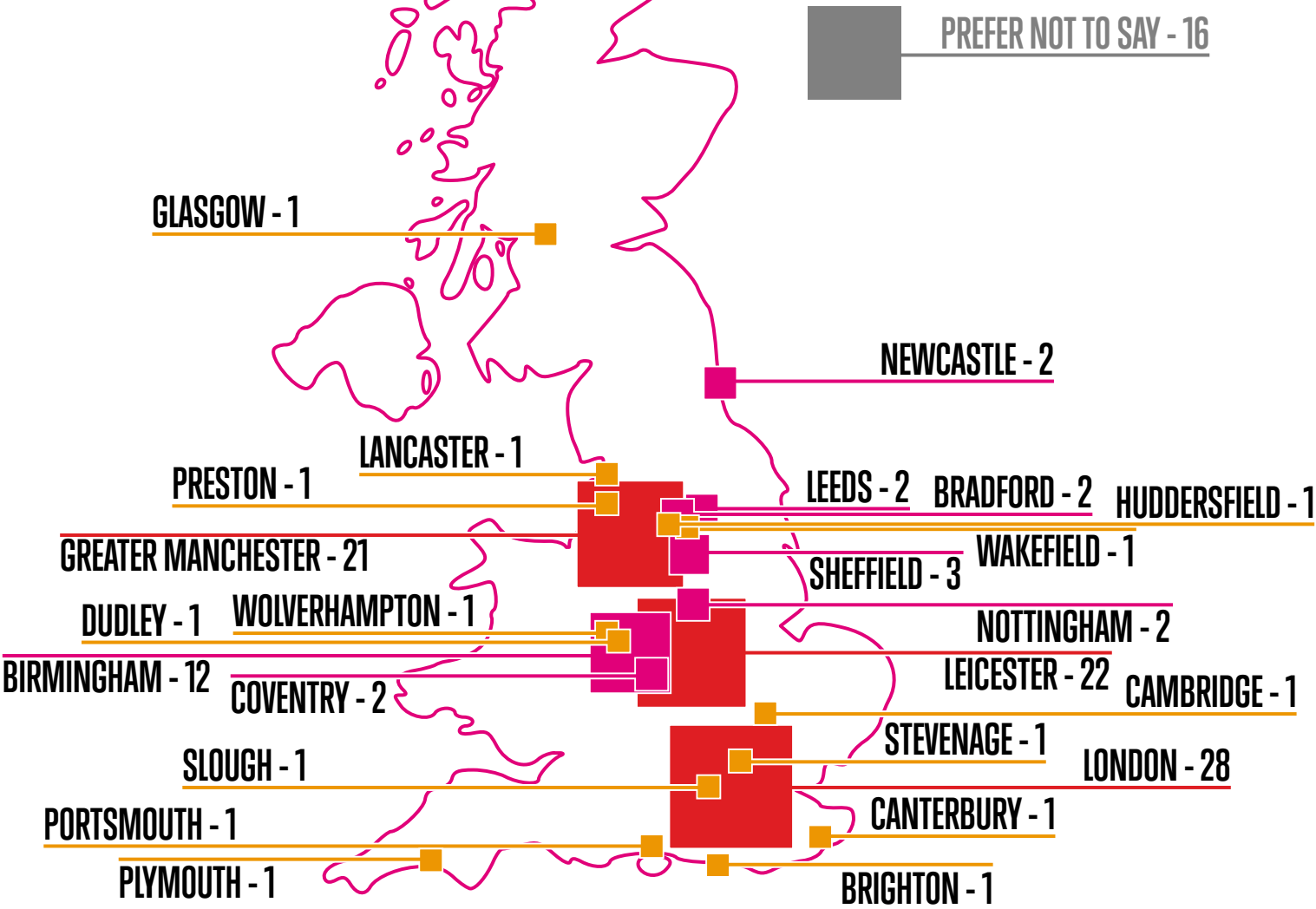
Responses mainly from 22-45 age group with 39% (50) being aged between 26-35 and 20% (25) aged between 22-25. Youngest was under 16 and oldest over 56.

Disability Status



Where Participants Live

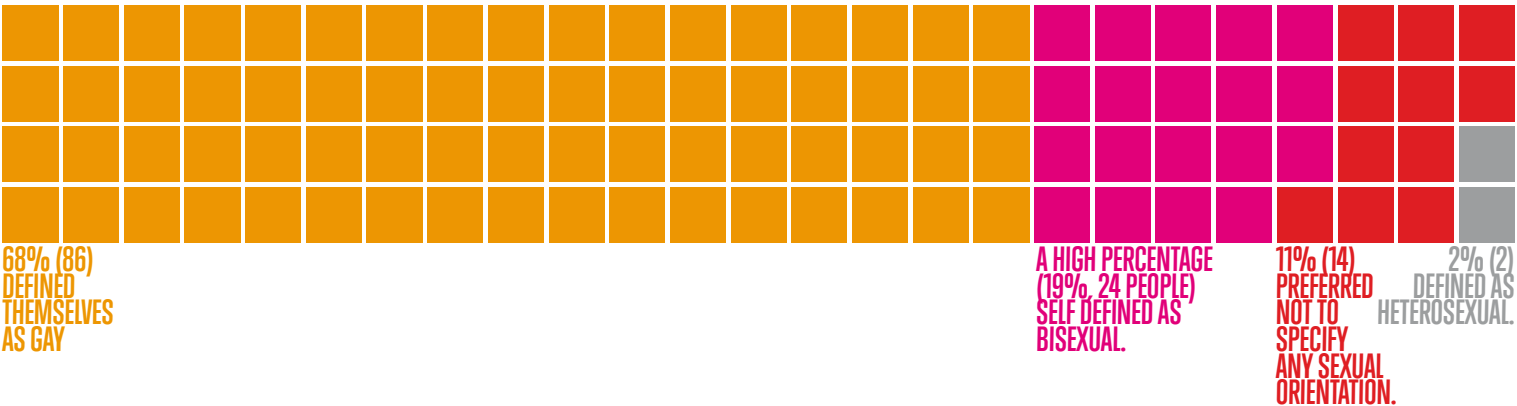
The area where participants were from is outlined below – city surrounding areas have been merged to the closest city.



Strong geographical spread with a range of responses across England with most responses from Midlands (31%, 39 people); North (28%, 35 people); South East (27%, 34 people). 12% (16) preferred not to give any area of residence and the smallest number of responses came from Scotland 1% (1) and South West England 1% (1), with no responses from Wales or Northern Ireland.

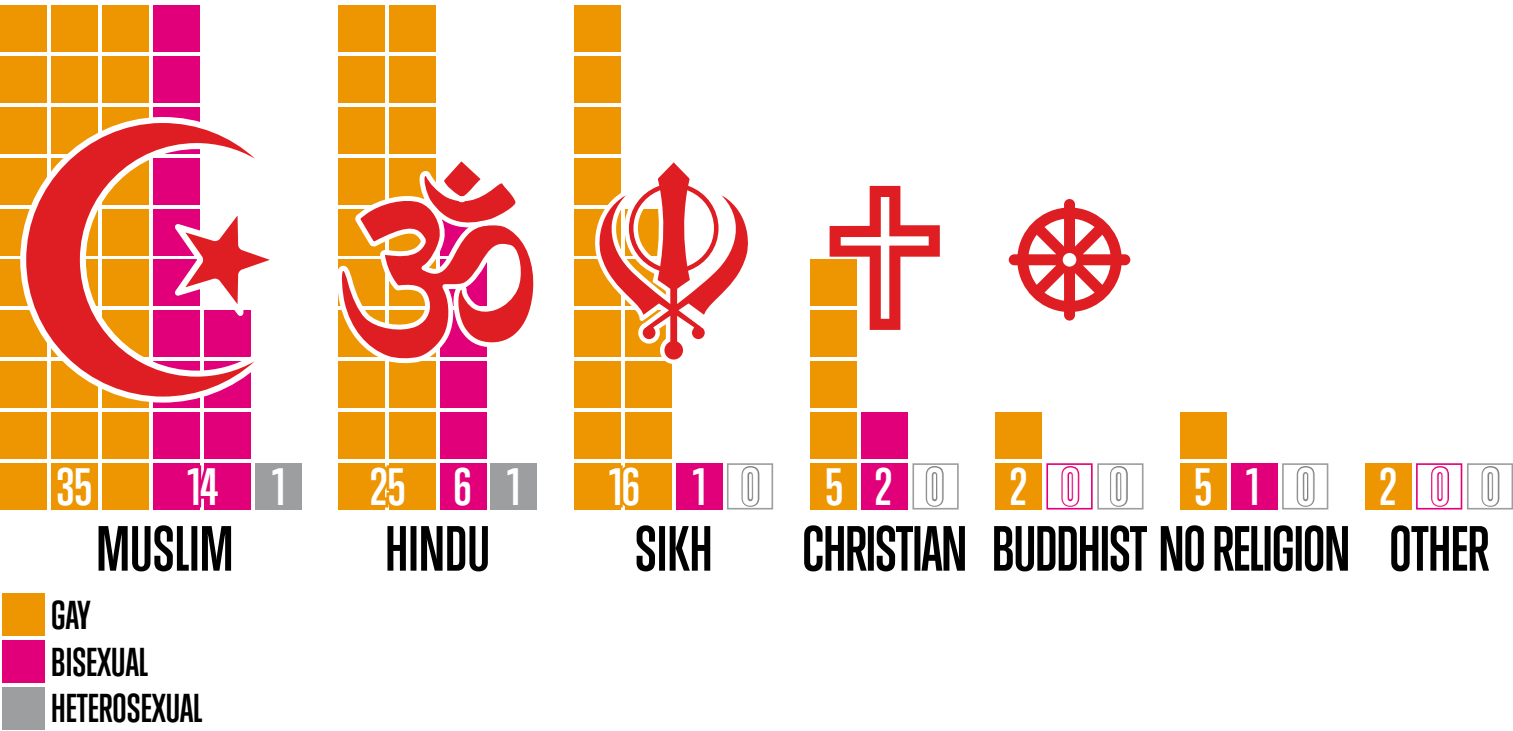
Sexual Identity

Of those who replied, their sexual orientation was identified as outlined below:



Religion

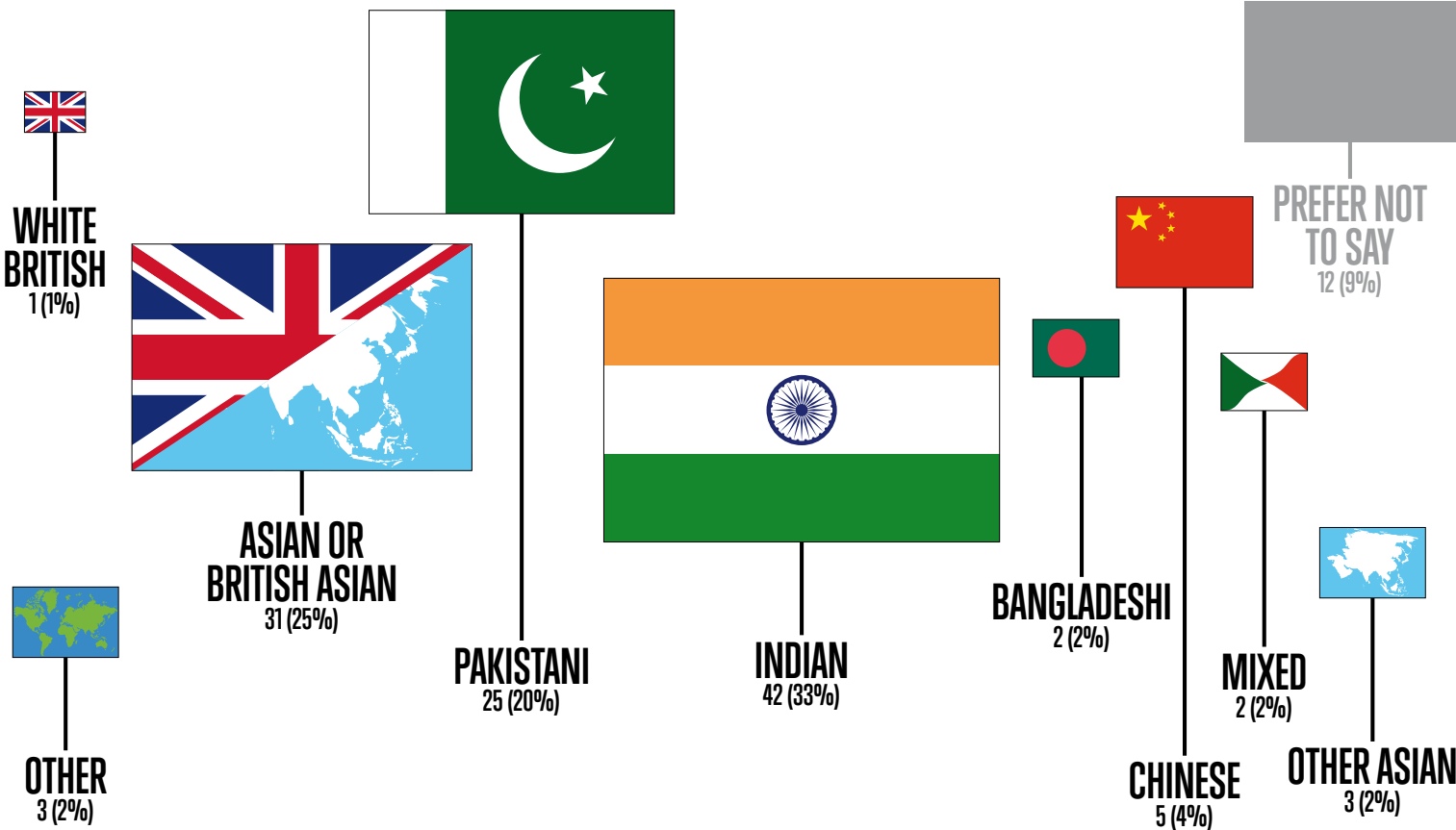
114 of the 126 participants identified both their religion and sexual orientation. The chart below shows the religions mentioned of those who declared their sexual orientation.



The high percentage of responses from those identifying as Muslim was not reflected in the focus groups and was mainly as a result of surveys completed online and anonymously.

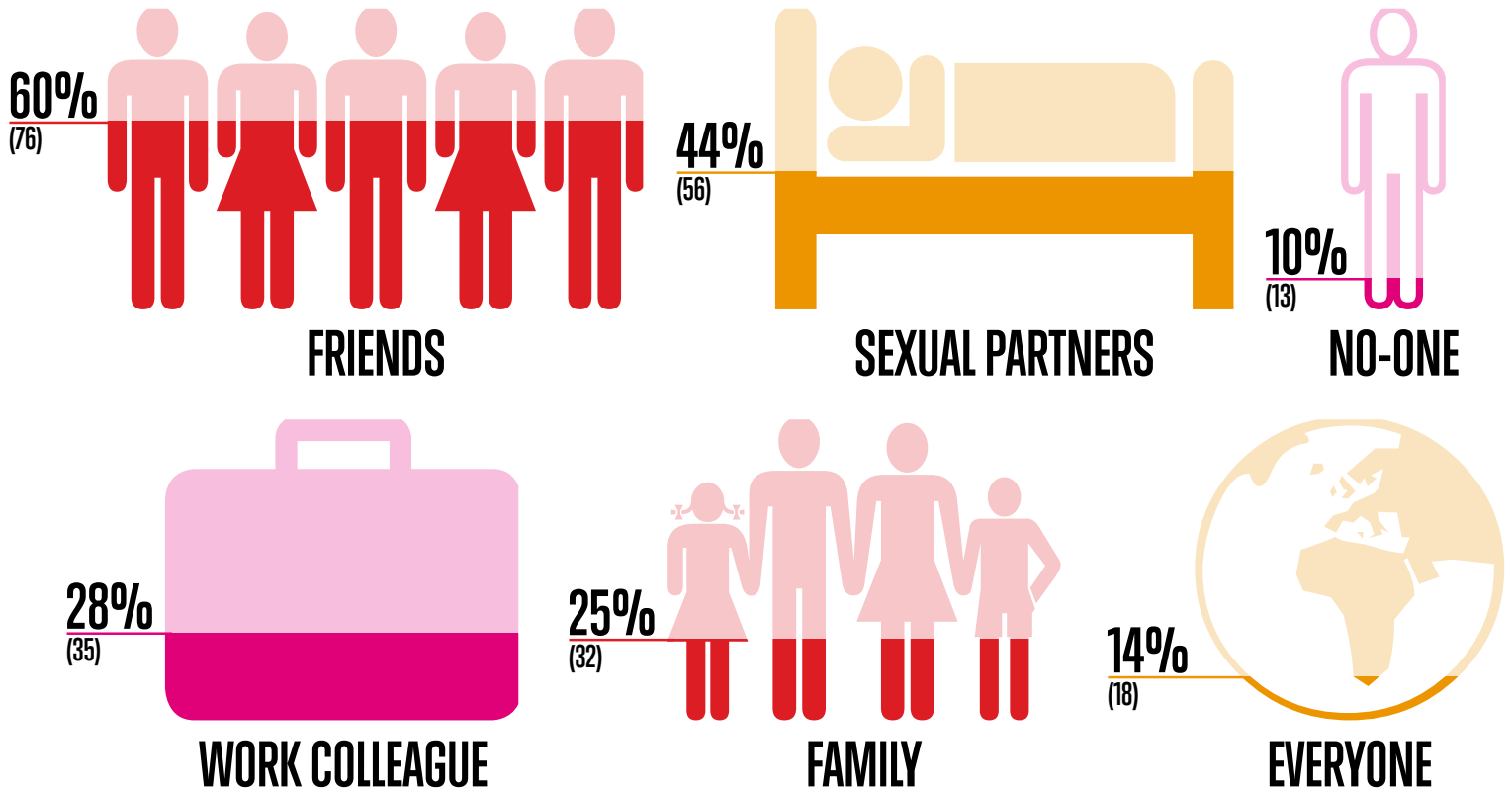
Ethnicity

Participants came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. In some of the surveys carried out face to face it was necessary to translate into several different languages verbally.



Outness

The Percentage of participants who state that they are 'out' to the following groups (percentage taken from the 126 participants):



These responses suggest that 90% are out to at least one person. 86% are not out to everyone. 75% are not out to family. 72% are not out at work. Surprisingly, 56% (70 people) are not out to sexual partners and 40% (50 people) are not out to their friends.

Participants Happy with their Sexual Orientation

41% (52) were not able to say that they felt happy about their sexual orientation and 24% (31) of those who responded clearly stated that they did not feel happy about their sexual orientation.

People gave a range of reasons to explain why they reported to feel unhappy with their sexual orientation:

- Fear of rejection from own community and family
- Cultural expectations/ getting married
- Clashes with religious values
- Internalised homophobia
- Racism on the scene
- LGBT scene, very male/white/youth orientated



Talking About Sex

In answer to the question

DO YOU KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS AND HIV?
only **67%** (85) said **YES**

When asked **77%** (97) of respondents said that they **FELT ABLE TO TALK ABOUT THE SEX THEY WANTED**
5% (6) said they did not and 18% (23) preferred not to say.

Only **56%** (70) of participants said that they **FOUND IT EITHER 'EASY' OR 'VERY EASY' TO TALK ABOUT SAFER SEX**
17% (22) preferred not to say.

The main reasons given by participants for not feeling able to discuss the sex they wanted with sexual partners included not having enough experience and fear of rejection. Some of the Comments received were:

'IT WOULD BE AWFUL FOR HER'

'BECAUSE NOT ALL ASIANS HAVE ENOUGH EXPERIENCE TO TELL ME, THUS IN TURN, I DO NOT WANT TO TELL THEM'

'SOMETIMES YOU CAN GET CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENT AND I HAVE AGREED TO DO THINGS THAT I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO DO'

Meeting Sexual Partners

Below are the percentages for participants and where they meet their Sexual Partners:

INTERNET

63% (79)

GAY BARS/CLUBS

44% (55)

SOCIAL NETWORKING

33% (41)

GAY SAUNAS

31% (39)

CLUB KALI/SAATHI NIGHT

25% (31)

CRUISING AREAS

15% (19)

PERSONAL ADS

12% (15)

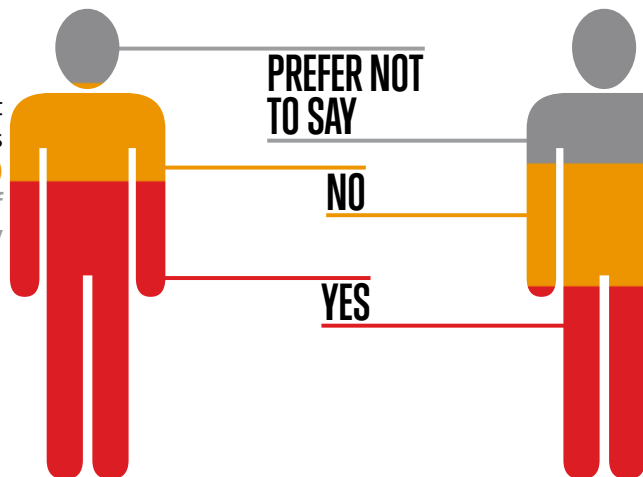
SOCIAL/SUPPORT GROUPS

8% (10)

According to the responses received, Asian MSM are meeting sexual partners in a variety of settings. Of particular interest is the popularity of themed Asian club nights with 25% (31) of those expressing a preference specifically mentioning particular events.

Socialising in Gay Bars

When asked if participants felt comfortable to socialise in Gay Bars **63% (79) said yes** with **21% (27) answering no** and 16% (20) of participants preferring not to say



When asked if the participants **ACTUALLY** socialised in Gay Bars there was a drop to **only 41% (51) answering yes**; an increase in Participants **saying no (22% - 28 people)** and 37% (47) preferring not to say

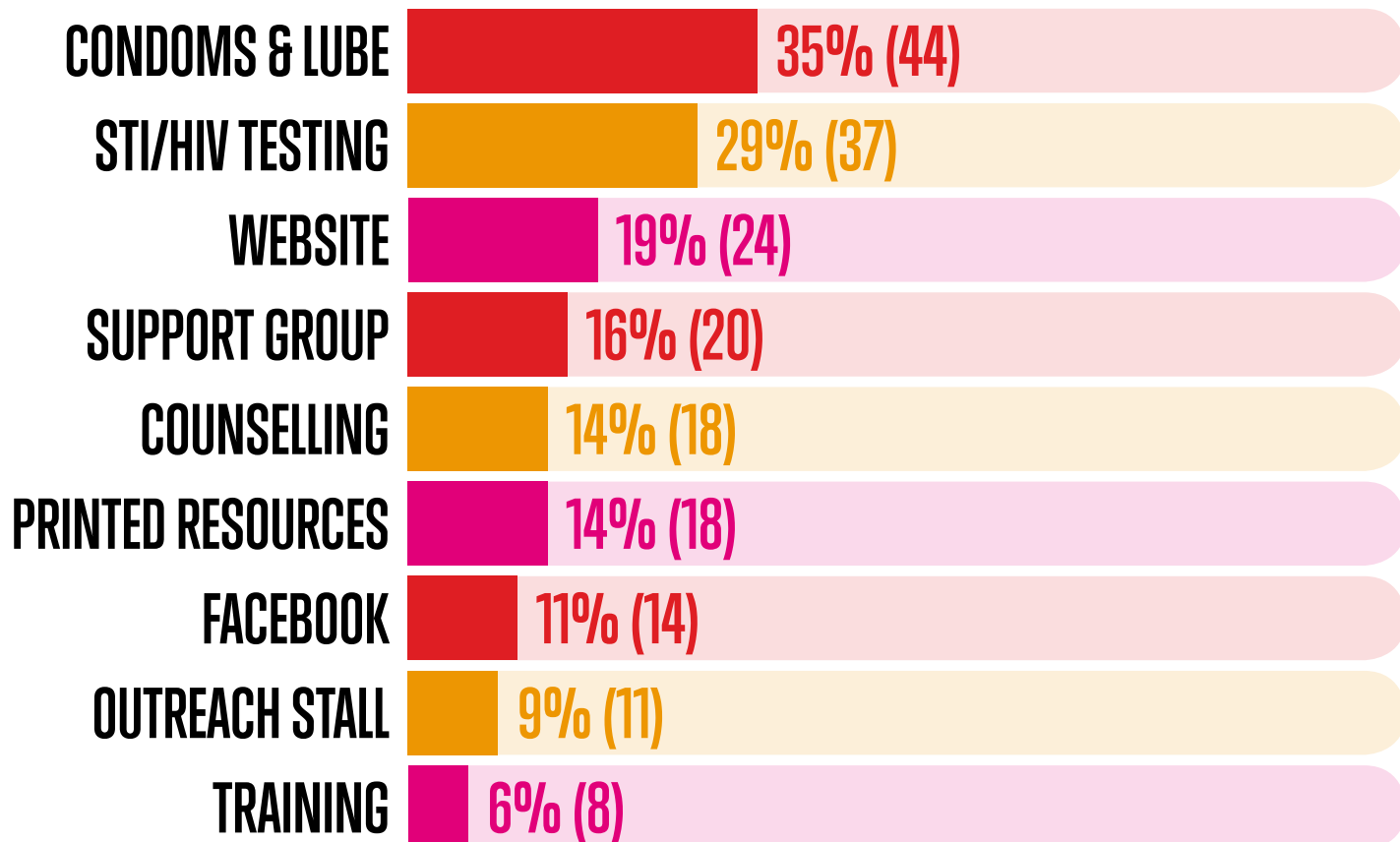
Social Networking

When asked which Social Networking sites were most popular for meeting Sexual Partners:



Accessing Services

Below are the percentages of participants who accessed services specifically for gay or bisexual men (percentage taken from the 126 participants):



50% (63) of participants stated that they have accessed a service that was specifically set up for gay or bisexual men. 39% (49) said that they did not access any service specifically for gay or bisexual men and 11% (14) of participants preferred not to say.

All service areas show relatively low levels of usage.

Barriers to Accessing Services

Participants' main reasons outlined for not accessing the services were that they "never needed to use the service" or they "didn't know about the service". The written responses to why people hadn't accessed the services available and why they felt the services were not for people like them were as follows:

Family pressure, feel intimidated
Not comfortable

I didn't think people understand me
and I will be even more isolated than
before

Not "out of the closet"
Would be difficult and possibly
dangerous to access such services

When asked what would make services more accessible suggestions included:

Cultural sensitivity
Better advertisement for different
ethnicities
Confidentiality/Discretion
Contact with others
Convenient time and meeting places

Mobile health service/Travel to where
is convenient for service users
Groups offering specific support to
Gay Muslims.
More services/services in isolated
areas
Online services

No Racism/ Safe space
More information about what they do
and where they are
Social networking events
Raising awareness within the Asian
community of LGBT issues

CHAPS 14 - Session 1 Wednesday 9 March 2011 2.30pm

The Rainbow Asian Project was outlined through a presentation and workshop session at CHAPS 14 to share findings to date and further gather evidence from those working in the field of sexual health within MSM communities. Titled 'Asian MSM' you can download the presentation here: www.chapsonline.org.uk/conference/c14-presentations

Stakeholder perspective key points issues and solutions

Barriers identified to accessing support for Asian MSM

RELIGION - IS BEING GAY ALLOWED?
ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY
ANYTHING NOT HETEROSEXUAL IS SEEN AS DEVIANT
FEAR OF, OR LOSS OF IDENTITY WITH FAMILY/LOSS OF HONOUR
FEAR OF LACK OF CONFIDENTIALITY
FEAR OF COMMUNITY GOSSIP
ARRANGED MARRIAGES
BEING AN 'IMMIGRANT'

Solutions identified to overcoming the barriers

SERVICES IN MORE GENERALISED SETTINGS
- NOT 'GAY' SPECIFIC
CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SERVICES AND MARKETING STRATEGIES
SERVICE USER GROUPS
USING KNOWN MENTORS (WORD OF MOUTH)
BELIEF IN TRUST AND CONFIDENTIALITY
FEMALE REPRESENTATIVES
ASIAN ROLE MODEL

SCHOOLING/EDUCATION
NORMALISING HIV
MARKETING ACCESS
UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL BACKGROUND/RELIGION
VOLUNTEERS AND PEER EDUCATION - BRINGING IN OTHERS (WITH USE OF KEY INDIVIDUALS)
CONFIDENCE BUILDING WORKSHOPS

One of the Rainbow Asian Project's outcomes is for CHAPS Partnership organisations to have an increased knowledge of the needs of Asian MSM and an increased understanding of effective targeted interventions. Below is information gathered from the dissemination of key findings at CHAPS 14 in Manchester.

INCREASED
KNOWLEDGE
OF ASIAN MSM NEEDS?

93%
GREATLY INCREASED
OR INCREASED

7%
NOT INCREASED

INCREASED
UNDERSTANDING
OF TARGETED INTERVENTIONS
FOR ASIAN MSM?

100%
GREATLY INCREASED
OR INCREASED

0%
NOT INCREASED

Rainbow Asian Project Focus Groups:

In total, 14 Asian MSM aged over 18 years old attended two focus groups at The Lesbian & Gay Foundation in Manchester and Trade Sexual Health in Leicester.



Background

To find out more about the needs of Asian MSM, we invited those interested from the surveys to contribute to discussions on how services could be improved to meet the needs of Asian MSM. The content of the focus groups developed and fully explored points raised in the questionnaires. However, the information received at both focus groups was incredibly detailed and insightful and although all points cannot be completely captured in this document, further information is available to any CHAPS partner who would like to find out more about the project's findings so far.

Observations

Stigma & Prejudice

Men attending the focus groups all said that they wanted to raise awareness around sexual health and HIV in the Asian community and acknowledged that it is difficult to do this when looking at the stigma and prejudice that exists within this community.

Outlets for Asian MSM

All contributors felt that they represented a hidden minority within a minority and that the only outlets for Asian MSM are often the internet and special themed club nights. Although Gay Asian nights are social events and many people go to them including heterosexual people, it was mentioned that Asian men don't necessarily go there to 'come out'.

Focus Groups

It was mentioned that physically coming to a focus group could be challenging for some people and that there was a "fear about confidentiality, if you aren't out publicly."

"I used to run support groups and club nights and I want to share my experiences and help feed into research to forward to decision makers."

"I've been involved in finding other gay Asian people around the country to help develop a project idea for South Asian men. Establish the facts and take specific needs forward that this work is needed and also 'I know LGF's work and I wanted to input with my opinions to help in any way I can.'"

Asian specific services

Various topics ranging from sexual health services to religion were discussed sparking debates within the group. The focus group facilitators found that initially all members of the group opposed the needs for Asian specific services, Asian workers or any other specific sexual health services geared towards Asian gay/bisexual/MSM men. However as the focus group came to a close and recommendations were suggested by the group, it was evident that individuals had changed their perceptions of the needs that Asian men have.

- On one hand, the group were saying that that they do not like to mix with other Asian gay/bisexual/MSM men but at the same time the focus group had provided a platform for the men to meet. We found that this was a welcomed experience for all the men involved who formed a social circle following the session.
- These different perspectives indicate the essential need to develop further understanding of the importance of sexual health education within the Asian gay/bisexual/MSM community.
- Facilitators saw that some individuals in this particular group of Asian men were confident and comfortable with their sexuality, which can be explained by the choice to take part in the focus group. However this perhaps did not include the more discreet Asian gay/bisexual/MSM community who may have felt that more Asian specific services are essential.

Does being gay and Asian have an impact on the sexual health services you access?

"I realised I was gay and started accessing services when I was 15. Sexual health was a big barrier because I was **terrified someone would see me** but that was a stigma about sexual health not about being Asian. Now I get tested regularly and freely pick up safer sex packs."

"Being Asian and gay is quite complicated, there are many external factors, many family questions, thoughts of 'maybe I need to go to another city-someone may see me, what will they say?' Internalized homophobia is also an issue."

"It seems to me that the main focus of people who are looking for sex with men is the sex. So things like activity with the other person isn't part of the issue. Things like checking your own sexual health is not part of the issue because you want to have sex, that's all it's about, isn't it?It's never part of the conversation that we go for sexual health tests."

"Families are obsessed with what neighbours think, respect is so important, it's all about upbringing. We should be challenging our parents but it still all revolves around what people think." "Honour, respect, keeping standards from possibly 20 or 30 years ago."

"If they're out it doesn't really mean that their families have accepted them or that they're not having issues about being out because just coming out can lead to so many issues in itself. That's probably preventing them from maybe going for screening or testing, whatever. They're probably still feeling isolated from their families that have probably disowned. Coming out doesn't just mean everything's okay."

One of the main topics raised in answer to this question was cultural and family issues. The fear of being seen accessing sexual health services, particularly those aimed at gay or bisexual men was thought to be a major barrier to many Asian MSM.

It was generally acknowledged that some Asian MSM do not come out and often lead double lives and therefore have more sexual partners because of this. It was suggested that there was a 'vicious cycle' as a result of keeping sexual orientation as a private matter and subsequently not getting checked up for sexual health check-ups.

The fact that family and culture dominate so much of the reasoning behind decisions to access or not access support cannot be underestimated. This suggests a need for organisations to be further aware of the many diverse cultural issues and conflicting pressures faced by Asian MSM.

Are Sexual Health Services in the gay community accessible for Asian MSM?

“For an Asian man accessing LGBT service provision it can be nerve-racking and daunting.”

“I think a lot of Asian men find it difficult to accept their sexuality or they’re struggling to come to terms with it. So they’re not really going to access a lot of health facilities, are they?”

“The building might be an issue because a lot of non-gay people know what it is.”

The location and building in which LGBT provision is located was sometimes described to be a barrier in itself to Asian MSM service users as most are decorated with overt symbols linked to the LGBT community. It was acknowledged that some Asian MSM may find it difficult to

access a venue that was ‘gay branded’ with rainbow flags etc. A common issue also raised was the concern that you may be seen on the gay scene and somehow this could get back to others in the Asian community and in turn family members.

Are Asian specific services needed for Asian MSM?

“We have to have specific services, separate at the beginning that **acknowledges cultural backgrounds, faith, internal backgrounds etc.** Some separate service with professionals who understand culture and religion who can take services forward.”

“No need for Asian specific testing services as such but more for support, counselling, people **trained about Asian issues, barriers, culture.**”

“An Asian orientated worker could be a good advocate to lessen the mental stress, to have someone who understands the things a gay/bi Asian man may be going through.”

Sometimes though a Black, Minority, Ethnic worker isn’t always the best option. I have noticed that some people would rather go to a stall staffed by a white person than someone from their own community, it doesn’t always follow.”

There were often very different views when answering the need for specific Asian workers.

While it was acknowledged that all workers should be more aware of the needs of people from different cultures, faiths and countries (suggesting a greater need for training and a wider understanding of men’s needs from a variety of different backgrounds), it was also felt helpful to have specific workers who would be able to relate instantly to Asian MSM or would be visible to them, thereby ensuring a

sense of confidence that their needs would be understood and addressed.

Specific ways of reaching out to Asian MSM included the suggestion of more stalls at Asian club nights as a successful way of doing outreach.

For sexual health screening, many men agreed that because it is understood that some Asian MSM use saunas, sexual health screening services should be more widely available in Public Sex venues.

Where do Asian MSM go for sexual health information and support?

“The internet isn’t specific but many Asian people would like something Asian specific to reference culture, faith etc. An LGBT Asian page with contact details etc.”

“Agencies should be working online perhaps speaking 1-1 in an online forum. Having someone online who you can talk to anonymously and with confidence.”

The Importance of having an online presence for Asian MSM was picked up at both focus groups. Following on from location as a barrier, groups discussed where they would access information and support. The men discussed Asian specific space on LGBT organisations’ websites. There was a sense sometimes the information is not specific enough and fear of someone finding out what was being looked at was a barrier to Asian MSM accessing information online.

It was clear that online information was popular but the issue of confidentiality, trust and discretion remains. It was mentioned that Asian MSM accessing the internet for sexual health reasons may worry about someone checking their history so there could be some barriers.

The importance of Outreach was also mentioned as it was thought that there was not enough specific information to meet the needs of Asian MSM.

Asian Workers: How important is talking to a worker from a similar cultural background?

“Initially it may be necessary to have the option of an Asian person as seeing someone else who is gay and Asian sends out positive messages and it is a huge boost.”

“The Asian worker doesn’t even have to do anything; just the presence of a person just makes the service more accessible. Just seeing someone, just walking past them makes you feel comfortable.”

“It would be quite ideal to have a counsellor to talk to, maybe from a similar background who’s gone through the cultural thing and maybe gone through an arranged marriage or whatever, or you’re the one and only son and you have to carry on the family, that sort of thing.”

The focus groups agreed that LGBT organisations should employ more Asian staff in order to make services more accessible to the Asian community. It was suggested that by having somebody who understands and can empathise with the service user’s culture will provide a higher level of service and encourage service users to access provision on a more regular basis.

It was felt important that a worker was non-judgmental and open-minded and that often stereotypes of Asian people aren’t helpful. ‘It isn’t all like ‘East is East.’ Religion was a big issue to both groups; being able to talk about faith openly and without any judgment to someone who understood the impact of religious teachings and the importance faith has on some Asian MSM’s lives.

Are resource materials representative of Asian MSM?

“Sex doesn’t fit into Asian life, it’s the same as with drugs and alcohol. Certain topics are a complete no-no culturally.”

“Most Asian men need to see another Asian man to relate I don’t think it has to be a model, it could be an Indian kind of doll.”

“If you’re going to say things you need to be specific. You need to say we actually offer a service to people who are any of these religions because when you say **‘it’s for Asians’** they’re like “but it’s only going to be for that kind of Asian and not for me”.

It was recommended by both groups that posters, leaflets, booklets etc need to have more images of Asian people in order to attract the attention of Asian men, without this it is much more likely that the advertising or information does not seem as applicable to the Asian gay/bisexual/MSM community. The groups both agreed that by having an Asian looking model or image there would be an instant

connection, allowing the community to feel included. As there are so many information resources aimed at the white community, anything different would stick out and would instantly attract the attention of Asian men.

It was recommended that targeted work with Asian MSM should utilise Asian mainstream media as even Bollywood

films now feature gay characters and storylines, addressing the fact that gay people do exist in Asian culture. One of the most important points raised was that any initiative should not be tokenistic and should be carried out regularly integrating Asian MSM with white MSM, so as not to be seen as stereotypical or merely looking at special issues.

What would improve services for Asian MSM in your opinion?

“Reassurance around workers is needed initially, to assure confidentiality.”

“Follow the counselling methodology of being non-judgmental.”

‘Awareness. Constantly pushing awareness that you are there. Don’t start something and then drop it a few months later.’

‘A Bollywood gay film night might help in developing an LGBT Asian social space.’

‘Speak to gay inclusive Asian club nights about doing outreach there.’

Buddying Scheme:

“I think having someone who might have been through what the other person is going through -- I think the whole point about this is it’s not about accessing clinics and stuff, it’s about the emotional support that somebody needs. To relate to somebody who is Asian or someone who has gone through something that you’ve gone through so you can relate to that person.”

Following the recommendation to employ more Asian workers, it was suggested by the group that a ‘buddying scheme’ would benefit the Asian community in terms

of having somebody who a new service user can relate to and gain support from. This could be a volunteer run project which encourages Asian men who are

confident or comfortable with their sexual orientation to be paired with another to get information or advice and establish an Asian MSM networking service.

Sexual Health Education in the Asian Community

“The Asian community, you want to educate them as well to learn how to change their views. But it becomes so difficult just trying to talk to them about anything.”

Something that stuck as an essential need was the aspect of education on two different levels. The first being LGB&T sexual health education within schools and generally aimed at a younger audience

alongside general sex education offered within the school curriculum.

Secondly, the idea of educating the Asian community as a whole would play a part in helping Asian MSM access sexual health provision.

Recommendations

Through the work of The Rainbow Asian Project, and by listening to the views of Asian MSM, we have been able to develop a range of recommendations, and associated practical tips, for both Commissioners and Providers:

1 TO INCREASE THE UNDERSTANDING OF ASIAN MSM'S, CULTURAL, FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES

1.1. By encouraging all health promotion workers (across sectors) to access learning opportunities regarding the needs of Asian MSM.

1.2. By ensuring that Asian MSM have the opportunity to discuss their needs, and share their experiences.

1.3. By developing diversity policies to include Asian MSM

2 TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE ASIAN ROLE MODELS WITHIN LGB&T COMMUNITIES.

2.1. By ensuring Asian MSM imagery is included on sexual health promotion and prevention information.

2.2. By ensuring Asian MSM are supported to access volunteering and employment opportunities within LGB&T organisations.

3 TO INCREASE THE ACCESSIBILITY AND PROMOTION OF SERVICES TO ASIAN MSM.

3.1. By delivering online work to access Asian MSM, including actively seeking out websites and chat rooms where Asian MSM network.

3.2. By promoting services in a range of ways, including targeted communication.

3.3. By conducting targeted outreach at specific gay affirmative Asian club nights.

4 TO REDUCE ISOLATION, THROUGH DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASIAN MSM TO MEET AND PROVIDE MUTUAL SUPPORT.

4.1. By establishing social support groups for Asian MSM.

4.2. By investigating opportunities for Peer led support, including buddying systems.

4.3. By gathering and using local and national evidence to support the development and funding of new services.

5 TO WORK WITH THE WIDER ASIAN COMMUNITY WHEREVER POSSIBLE, TO PROMOTE POSITIVITY AND INCLUSIVITY ABOUT ASIAN MSM.

5.1. By exploring and strengthening links with the wider Asian Community.

5.2. By working in partnership with Asian organisations.

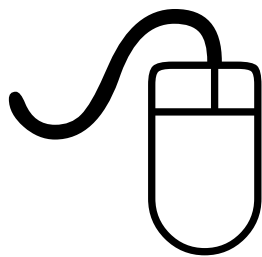
What next?

This Report aims to help individuals and organisations to become involved and stay involved in addressing the needs of Asian MSM. Trade Sexual Health and The Lesbian & Gay Foundation would very much like to hear from you if you have any questions about this report and the work of The Rainbow Asian Project.

Stay Involved

- 1: Keep in Touch. Please checkout The Lesbian & Gay Foundation and Trade Sexual Health online.**
- 2: Tell us what you think. We would like to hear your comments about The Rainbow Asian Project and also what you are doing to support Asian MSM.**
- 3: Help to develop work with Asian MSM. Please contact us for an informal discussion on how the Rainbow Asian Project recommendations can be implemented or if you have any questions about this report.**

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THE LESBIAN & GAY FOUNDATION AND TRADE SEXUAL HEALTH WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE CHAPS PARTNERSHIP, ALL STAFF, AGENCIES, VOLUNTEERS AND GROUPS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT. A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL THE MEN WHO SHARED INFORMATION WITH US FOR THE RAINBOW ASIAN PROJECT.

SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS:
PAUL JONES, EXPOSURE

'I WANT TO SHARE
MY EXPERIENCES'

'WHAT DOES MY RELIGION SEE ME AS?'

'MAYBE I NEED TO GO TO ANOTHER CITY
- SOMEONE MAY SEE ME'

'SEEING SOMEONE WHO IS GAY AND
ASIAN SENDS OUT POSITIVE MESSAGES'

'FAMILIES ARE OBSESSED WITH
WHAT NEIGHBOURS THINK'

'MANY ASIAN PEOPLE WOULD
LIKE SOMETHING ASIAN SPECIFIC'



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