Reaching MSM and transgenders in HIV/SRHR integration

Recommendations from a global intervention review to identify strategies to increase the responsiveness and relevance of integrated programming to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of high-risk groups

Integration is a vital strategy to respond to the unmet HIV and SRHR needs of MSM and transgenders.

Background

Men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender (TG) people often experience greater vulnerability to poor SRH, may have specific or more complex needs and experience additional barriers to accessing and demanding services. While policy support for HIV/SRHR integration is increasing, significant questions persist about what such programming means in practice for key populations. Integration may be desirable in the long-run; concerns remain about how joining programmes and systems that are not ready could compromise quality of and access to services.

Methods

A global review of over 160 resources focusing on HIV/SRHR integration for key populations and available on websites of selected national and international organisations was undertaken. The objective of the review was to assess how HIV/SRHR integration can not only improve the efficiency of programmes but also truly serve the needs of MSM and TG people. The review aimed to identify strategies to increase the responsiveness and relevance of integrated HIV/SRHR programming for these communities. These include the need to address stigma and discrimination, demand generation, gender inequalities, service provider attitudes and capacity and to ensure rights based approaches, adequate and appropriate evidence and information to understand diverse needs, strong referral systems and adequate technical and financial support.

What lessons have been learned about HIV/SRHR integration for MSM and TG people?

- Understand the different ‘types’ of MSM and TG people and, in turn, that different HIV/SRHR needs. Experiences of social stigma and discrimination, and role and relationships may differ between different men (including receptive vs. penetrative sex, male and/or female, multiple partners or paying clients).
- Recognise the specific vulnerability and needs of transgender people; in many contexts, TG people are particularly marginalised from services, with their SRHR needs poorly understood or addressed.
- Not make presumptions about the HIV/SRHR needs or desires of MSM and TG people.
- Emphasise the rights of sexual minorities and of MSM and TG people to HIV/SRHR services.
- Provide specific support to female partners of MSM – may require tailored referrals or direct service provision.
- Recognise and address the reality that most SRH services assume heterosexual clients - especially married couples.

Results

- There appears to be little clear consensus on the most effective HIV/SRHR integration strategies specifically for MSM and TG people.
- Common challenges across integrated programmes for key populations highlighted the need to follow good practice principles for programming for these communities. These include the need to address stigma and discrimination, demand generation, gender inequalities, service provider attitudes and capacity and to ensure rights based approaches, adequate and appropriate evidence and information to understand diverse needs, strong referral systems and adequate technical and financial support.
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HIV/SRHR Service Package for MSM and Transgenders

The review indicated that, building on a generic essential package for HIV/SRHR, there are a number of components that may need specific attention in integrated programming for MSM and TG people. These include information, support and services related to:

- Tailor made HIV prevention and behaviour change communication
- Sexuality and sexual health
- Support for TG people on gender management and feminising procedures
- STIs
- Negotiation within sexual relationships
- Hepatitis information and vaccination
- Sexual violence, including PEP
- Screening, vaccination and support in relation to HPV and anal cancer
- Sexual dysfunction
- Condoms and lubricants
- safer sex
- Legal support
- Support for sexual partners including PR, MNCH and other SRHR services for female partners
- Counselling and support for disclosure of sexuality and/or HIV status

Conclusions

Integration is a vital strategy to respond to the unmet HIV and SRHR needs of MSM and transgenders. However, integration that is premature, overly rapid or too large-scale risks compromising rather than enhancing access to high quality HIV and SRHR services for MSM and transgenders. Good practice principles are particularly critical in HIV/SRHR integration for these populations.

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