

# “Transgendercide”

## The Impact Of Conceptualizing Transgenders As *Men Who Have Sex With Men*

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### Introduction

Over the course of the AIDS pandemic there have been significant shifts in how HIV practice and policy define and address various vulnerable groups. Today, many HIV agencies classify Male-to-Female transgenders as "men who have sex with men" (MSM) which violates transgenders' right to self determination and increasingly limits them to accessing services aimed at men. Re-defining transgenders as MSM invisibilises them in HIV statistics so opportunities to identify and address their vulnerabilities are missed. Re-labelling transgenders as men, of any sexual orientation, undermines access to services, possibilities for innovative, peer-led programs, and opportunities to identify and address our health and human rights issues.

### Transgenders

Transgenders are people whose gender identity does not coincide with the gender assigned to them at their birth. Transgenders are a diverse group, and while the definition is still a point of discussion, it can include among others

- . Male-to-Female transgenders
- . Female-to-Male transgenders
- . People not identifying as either male or female
- . Culturally specific gender variant groups
- . Etc.

While some transgenders pursue medical treatments, such as hormone therapy and sexual reassignment surgery, others do not. Also some opt only for partial “transitionings”. As such the diversity of “bodies” among transgenders is very broad and can often not just be understood as male or female.

Transgenders are included in the broader LGBT movement and communities, however that does not mean that being transgender is a sexual orientation such as homosexuality. The sexual orientation of transgendered people can be directed at men, women or other transgenders, regardless on how they identify or how their bodies are defined.

As a minority within this society transgenders face considerable stigmatisation and discrimination throughout the world. Further more, transgender communities often intersect with those of other vulnerable groups such as sex workers, migrants, drug users etc. due to this stigma.

### Transgenders role in prevention

Throughout the epidemic transgenders have played an important part in prevention and care projects for among others sex workers, drug users, people living with HIV/AIDS, migrants, prisoners and gay men.

In many countries transgenders were formerly able to work in communities and access services for all these populations, and in some cases to form our own group. However donors, governments and the UN have increasingly defined transgenders as "MSM" which violates our right to self determination.

While this increasingly limits transgenders to accessing services aimed at men, a denial to self determination also jeopardizes transgender community involvement which is, in light of the importance of inclusion of target groups in prevention strategies, essential for succesful any HIV prevention project directed towards transgenders.

### Transgenders invisibilised

Considering the diversity of transgenders lives, even for specific group as Male to Female transgenders, the conceptualization of transgenders as MSM is based on the assumption that Male to Female transgenders have male bodies that sexually interact with male bodies. However, Male-to-Female transgenders constitute a diverse group of identities, bodies and sexual practices.

Transgenders are rarely “just” transgendered people. Often they are also part of other vulnerable groups. Re-positioning transgenders into the MSM paradigm often leads to exclusion in other prevention policies directed at populations they too are not only a part of, but whose specific needs also concern them on top of their needs as a transgendered person.

It are especially these transgenders who are also (illegal) migrants, sex workers, drug users etc. that have a greater need due to not being just part of one vulnerable group but crossing through multiple ones at the same time.

They must not just be visible as transgenders, but also as sex workers, drug users, migrants, etc.

### Summary

Transgenders' diverse lives constitute equally diverse needs in terms of HIV prevention that *cannot be simply equated with those of men*, regardless of their sexual orientation. Doing so ...

- . Violates transgenders right for self-determination.
- . Invisibilises transgenders and their specific needs
- . Severely limits transgenders' communities involvement in the fight against HIV/AIDS

### Moving forward...

- . Transgenders from several organisations and their supporters are calling on the UN, HIV agencies, policy organisations, women’s organisations, gay groups and civil society to recognise *the right to self define*.
- . Agencies are asked *not to address* transgenders in HIV programming and policy as MSM and to engage with communities concerning *all levels* of HIV programming and policies, including defining policies.
- . Heeding this call will help make HIV programs *more respectful, and therefore more effective*, and enable better understandings of transgenders within HIV epidemics.

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