

SA AIDS 2009 MSM Satellite Conference

Research and Advocacy: Sharing the strength, bridging the gap30 - 31 March 2009

Durban, South Africa

Gender DynamiX was invited to attend this conference and present a paper on the risks trans women, who are still "male bodied", have to face as they engage in sexual activities with men.

Many of the papers presented dealt with the findings of various research studies that had been done on men who have sex with men (MSM). Many of the studies had very varying results but one common thread was that MSM are the section of society that are most at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other STDs. The variation in statistics could be attributed to the differences in definitions and terms used during the surveys. A unified survey would have to have consensus on these terms.

Caroline from Gender DynamiX started her presentation by adding another definition or term to the fray by indicating that the M in MSM could also refer to "male bodied" trans women. Many of these trans women are at very high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other STDs as they often resort to sex work in order to finance their transitions. Caroline also raised the lack of adequate knowledge within the medical sector when it comes to treating trans women. They are often misunderstood and turned away from clinics because they don't quite fit in with the services offered by the clinic.

The Health4Men project in Cape Town showed a lot of interest in collaborating with Gender DynamiX to improve the services they are offering to their clients and to be able to better treat any trans women that may request their services.

Many good contacts were made with other organisations who are working in the field of MSM and some potential collaborations will be looked into. It also became clear that some current research being conducted by some groups like the Desmond Tutu Foundation could be expanded to include more data on trans women and Gender DynamiX could assist in an advisory capacity.