

Self Perception among MSM (Men Sex with Men)

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to understand the Self perception of MSM using Arkoff (1985), Who Am I? Technique. Self Perception is based on how one views himself and how he views people perceive him . Content analysis was done to analyze the data and findings indicated that MSM have a negative Self perception based on self and also negative Self perception of Self based by others.

Keywords: Self perception, Men who have sex with Men.

Introduction

The term "Men who have Sex with Men" (MSM) addresses to those who engage in sexual relationships exclusively with other men (homosexuality). It is important to understand and distinguish between the concepts of sexual identity, orientation and behaviour. One's identity is how one identifies oneself, in spite of orientation or sexual desire and behaviour. Sexual behaviour, as the abbreviation MSM usually addresses, does not correlate entirely with sexual identity and orientation in many cases, but rather focuses on a description of sexual practices. However, the term 'MSM' has evolved in many parts of India to now take on meanings of identity as well (Setia et al., 2008).

Historically as well as now, most discourse regarding the health of MSM populations worldwide has centered on HIV and the AIDS epidemic. Men, who have sex with men (MSM), in contrast with their heterosexual counterparts, have poorer mental health and experience more mental distress (Subramanian et al., 2011; Sandfort et al., 2006). Research suggests that men who have sex with men (MSM) are at greater risk of psychiatric disorders, especially depression, substance use, and suicide, compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Gilman et al., 2001; Cochran et al., 2000; Sandfort et al., 2001, Meyer, 2003. Hiding their orientation leads to low self-esteem due to non-acceptance of their nature, while disclosure to significant others puts MSM at a risk of facing hostile reaction and stigma, both of which predispose them to develop emotional problems Ryan et al., 2009

Self Perception

Personal self-concept (or self-perception or personal role-based identity) entails one's personal assessment and awareness with regard to social, cognitive and physical attributes of her/his existence (Marsh et al., 2010). Thus, personal self-concept mirrors the way one thinks and feels about his/her self, thereby incorporating one's self-awareness, personal esteem and self-confidence Marsh et al., 2010, Zlatkovic et al., 2012.

There is a dearth of research reported on the topic relating to self perception of Men who have Sex with Men and thus studies have been quoted in reference to the other dimensions covered in the area. Soohinda et al. 2018, Yadav et al. 2014, and Patel et al. 2012. This led the researcher to pick up this study.

Rationale of the study

This study aims to understand the self perception of men who have sex with men, of how they consider them from the point of view of self and based on the view of self according to others. MSM face a very uncomfortable life on daily. MSM's are at higher risk of mental disorder, suicidal ideation, substance misuse, and deliberate self harm than heterosexual people (King et al., 2008). Witnessing their scenario in the society it is visible that dying with dignity is also denied to them. So the need of the hour is to stop marginalizing them and instead develop a sensitive approach around them to study and understand them



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Method

Objective of the Study

To study the self perception among Men who have sex with men.

Hunches

In terms of paucity of researches considering psychological perspective a lack of direct studies have been observed and though the current study is designed based on:

1. The self perception of MSM according to self will be positive.
2. The self perception of MSM according to others will be negative.

Variables:

Independent Variable

MSM Behaviour

The term "Men who have Sex with Men" (MSM) addresses to those who engage in sexual relationships exclusively with other men (homosexuality).

Dependent Variable

Self-Perception

Arkoff, 1985 suggests that the way we come to see and regard ourselves could be called "the basic relationship" because it becomes such a fundamental force in our lives.

Research Design

An ex-post facto research with an exploratory orientation.

Sample

Sample for the present study was selected on the basis of snowball sampling. It consisted of 50 MSMs selected from CREATE organization Lucknow.

Measure used

'Who Am I?' technique (Arkoff, 1985) will be used for the present study. It is a semi projective technique which explores one's perceived self in relation to significant others in the life space. There are variety of ways in which 'Who am I?' Technique is used by personality researchers. In the present study 'Who am I?' was used to assess self perception, i.e. "What's good and not so good about me? The positive and negative shades of self.

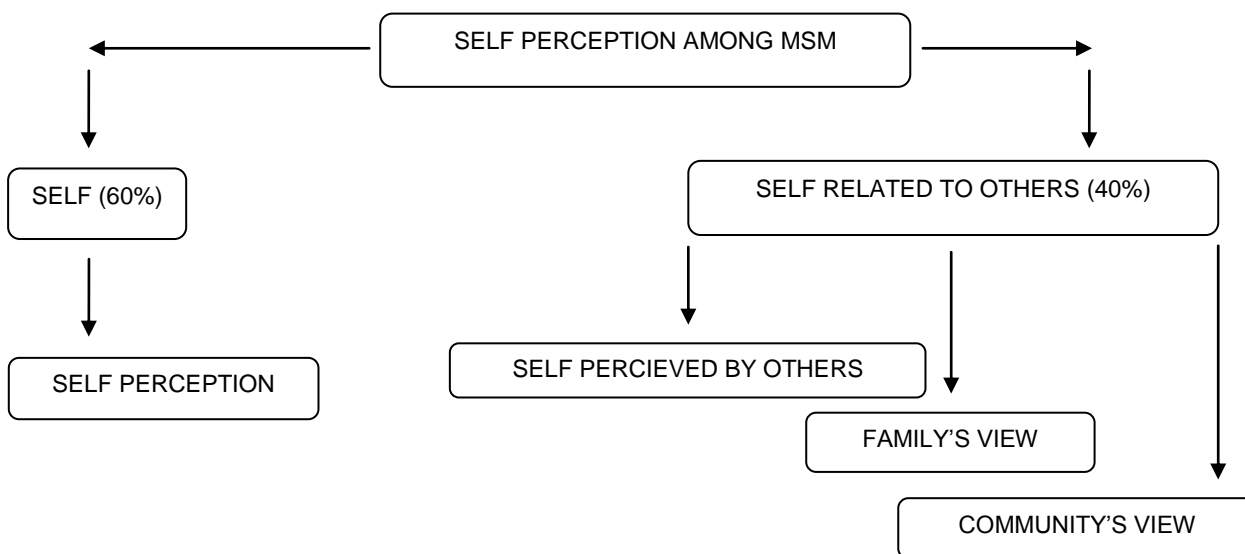
Statistical Analysis

As it is a projective measure so content analysis of the data was performed and percentages were computed.

Results and Discussion

Results basically pertains to a belief about Self perception and others perception according to self and it has been further depicted in the Figure- 4.1.

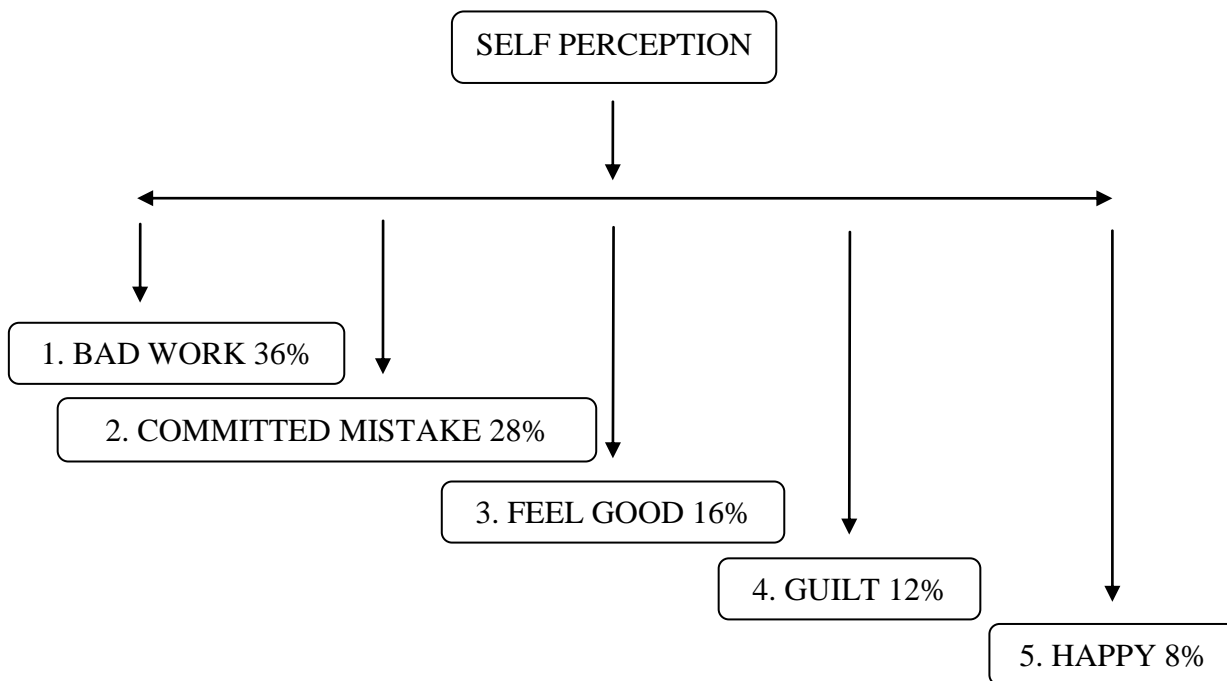
Figure- 4.1 Showing categories of Self Perception among MSM



To understand the data in depth further it is divided into subcategories which emerged in self and self related to others which will be discussed through

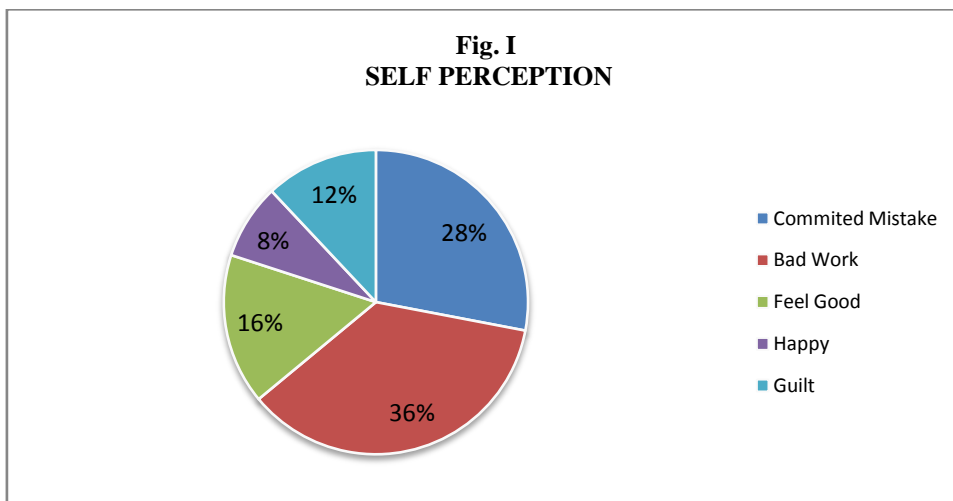
separate figures and are mentioned below starting with figure 4.2 which provides a description of how MSM perceives their own self:-

Figure- 4.2 Showing subcategories of Self



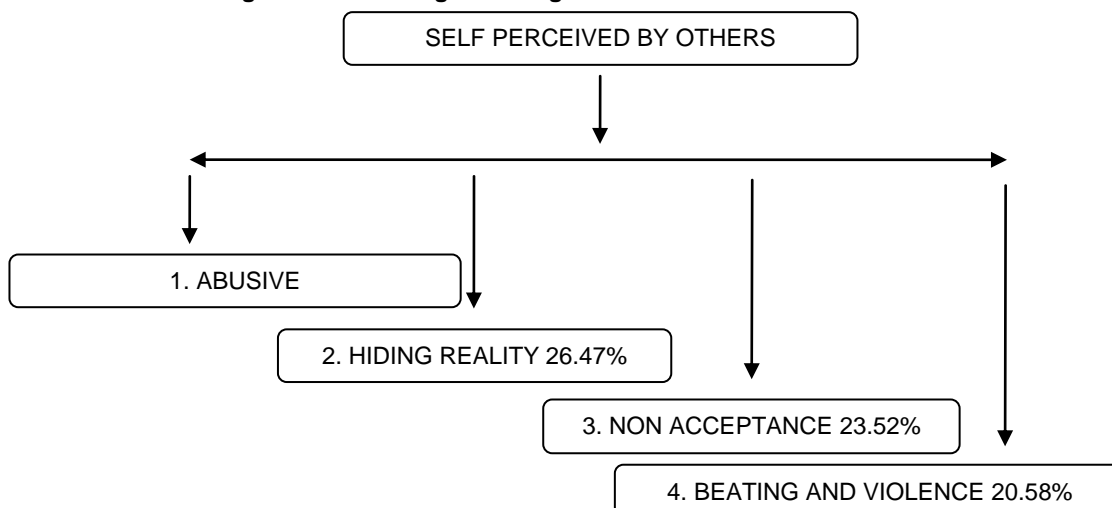
As depicted in Fig. 1 the self perception of respondents was explored under this major category 5 subcategories emerged and the highest percentage was obtained of **bad work** with 36% here bad work means according to the verbatim हमको महसूस होता है कि एक मर्द होकर मर्द से प्रेम करके व उससे इंटिमेसी रखकर हमने बहुत गन्दा काम किया है, following this the next subcategory that emerged was **committed mistake** with 28% and the response received on this was जवानी में गलती करी किजोश-जोश में हमने यह सबकर के अपना बहुत कीमती समय बर्बाद कर लिया है आज हमारे साथी कहीं बैंगलौर तो कोई चेन्नई में है और हम यहाँ हैं काश हमने भी पढ़ाई लिखाई में समय लगाया होता तो आज कहीं अच्छी जगह होते और कुछ बढ़िया कर रहे होते, following this the other subcategory was **feel good** with 16% and the response received was हमे बड़ा अच्छा महसूस होता है खुद को लेकर कि हमने कभी किसी का बुरा नहीं चाहा जिससे प्यार किया पूरी शिद्दत से किया कभी धोका नहीं दिया और हम जो करना चाहतेथे वो ही हमने किया भले ही उसके लिए हमे पूरे समाज से ही लड़ना पड़ा हो पर कोई गिला शिकवा नहीं है, and with nominal differences another subcategory of **guilt** was obtained with 12% and the response was आज भले ही हम उम्र के इस मुकाम पर पहुंच चुके हैं लेकिन काफी कुछ

हमने अपनी जिन्दगी से गवा दिया है तो कभी कभी ऐसा लगता है कि हमने ऐसा कर के कोई अपराध कर दिया हो जैसे, खाली अकेले में बैठते हैं तो पलटकर जबभी देखते हैं जिन्दगी अपनी तो हमेशा एक अधूरापन सा दिखता है और उससे बहुत तकलीफ होती है, and finally unfortunately the most positive subcategory that was **happy** emerged with the least score of 8% and the verbatim obtained was हम जैसे भी हैं या हमने जो कुछ भी किया है अपनी लाइफ में उससे हम संतुष्ट है और हम खुद को खुशहाल मानते हैं और अक्सर खुश रहने कि ही कोशिश करते हैं, henceforth the above description brings in light the point that MSM perceive themselves based on the bad work they did or are doing, the mistakes that they committed while indulging in this behaviour although certain positive responses like feel good and happy have been received but again it is followed by guilt so overall the self perception of MSM is dominated by negative responses. The very much probable reason for this finding maybe that MSM are aware that the behaviour they indulge in is not extensively appreciated, validated and accepted in the society so the guilt that prevails is evident in the responses obtained, Chan and Mak, 2019 MSM living with HIV more vulnerable to negative self-concept, maladaptive coping, and peer isolation, which contribute to poor mental and social health.



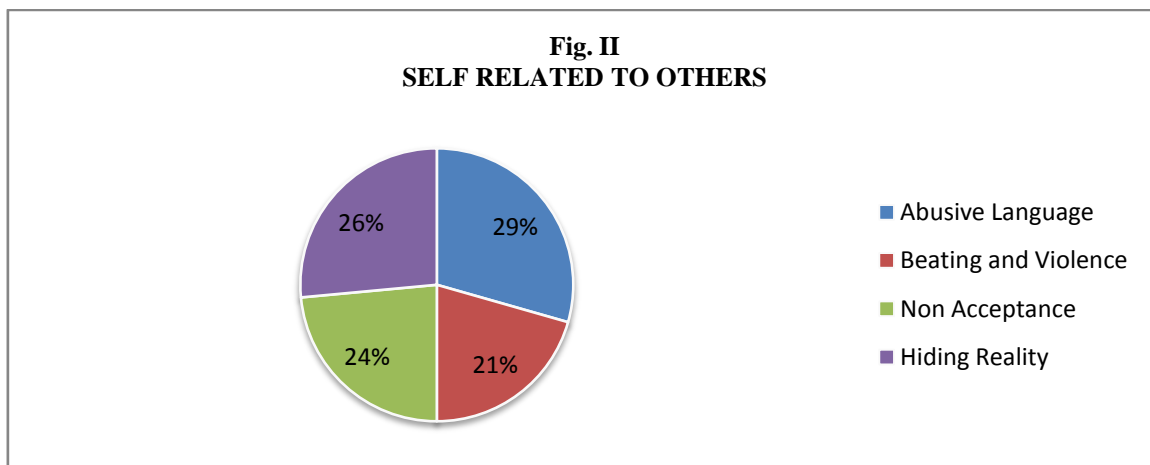
Now having discussed the category of self perception, coming towards the other major category that has emerged self perception according to others (Figure 4.3). Others in terms of those people which they are related to like people from immediate surrounding and their community. As major chunk of self concept is established on what others think of individual's self?

Figure- 4.3 Showing Subcategories of Self Related To Others



As depicted in Fig. II self related to others was explored under this major category 4 subcategories emerged and the highest score was obtained of **abusive language** with 29.41% abusive language means according to the verbatim बगैर गाली सुने ऐसा लगता ही नहीं है की दिन पूरा हुआ है, followed by the next subcategory of **hiding reality** with 26.47% अगर हम किसी को ये बता दें की हमे औरत में नहीं आदमियों में इंटरैस्ट हैतो लोग ऐसी नज़रों से देखते हैं की न जाने हमने कितना बड़ा गुनाह कर दिया हो, following this the next category emerged in the name of **non acceptance** with 23.52%, non acceptance here indicates that बाहर हम किसी को बता नहीं सकते कि हमे आदमी पसंद हैं और अगरकिसी को पता लग जाये तो वो इंसान तुरंत हमसे दूर भागता है या तो गन्दी गालियां देता है पर कोई हमको स्वीकार करने को राज़ी नहीं होता जल्दीand the lowest score is attained in the

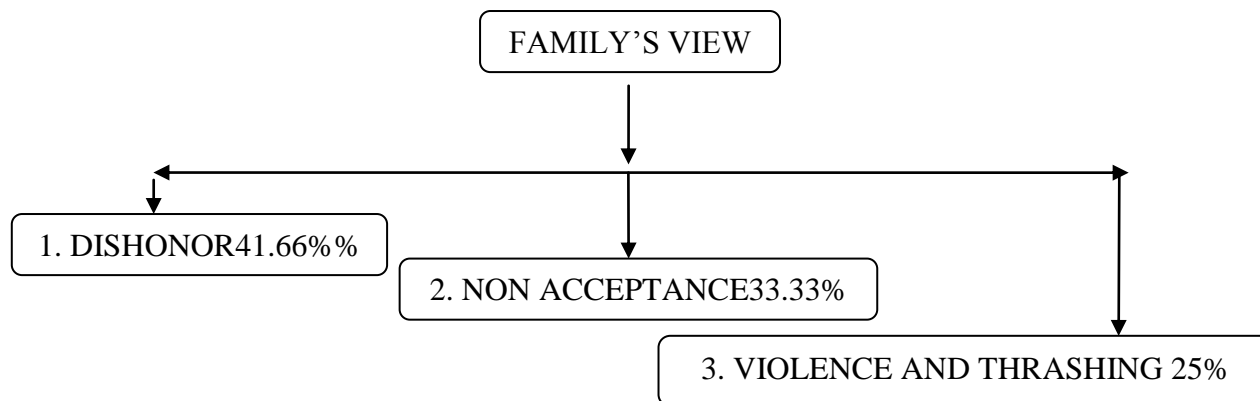
subcategory of **beating and violence** with 20.58% which here means that आज से अगर बात करें दस या बीस साल पहले कि तो हमारा घर से बाहर निकलना बिलकुल खतरों से खेलने जैसा होता था कब कौन आकर लाठी चला दे या पत्थर से मार दे कुछ भरोसा नहीं था वो तो अब जाकर थोड़ी राहत हुई है कि अब जल्दी कोई हाथ नहीं उठता जब से यह बिल पास हुआ है वरना पहले तो हमारी लाइफ की कोई गारंटी नहीं थी, henceforth, the above mentioned description indicate that the self perception of MSM based on others is negative as evident by the responses as well as not even a single positive category has been observed. The very much probable reason for this finding maybe that although the bill has passed by the Supreme Court but somewhere down the line society believes that MSM are breaking the laws of nature by indulging intimately with similar sex partner and they are challenging the beliefs and already established traditional patterns of sexual behavior.Kushwaha et. al., 2017



Under the major category of self related to others another category emerged that considered family's view which further included three subcategories as discussed in Fig 4.4. Family's view

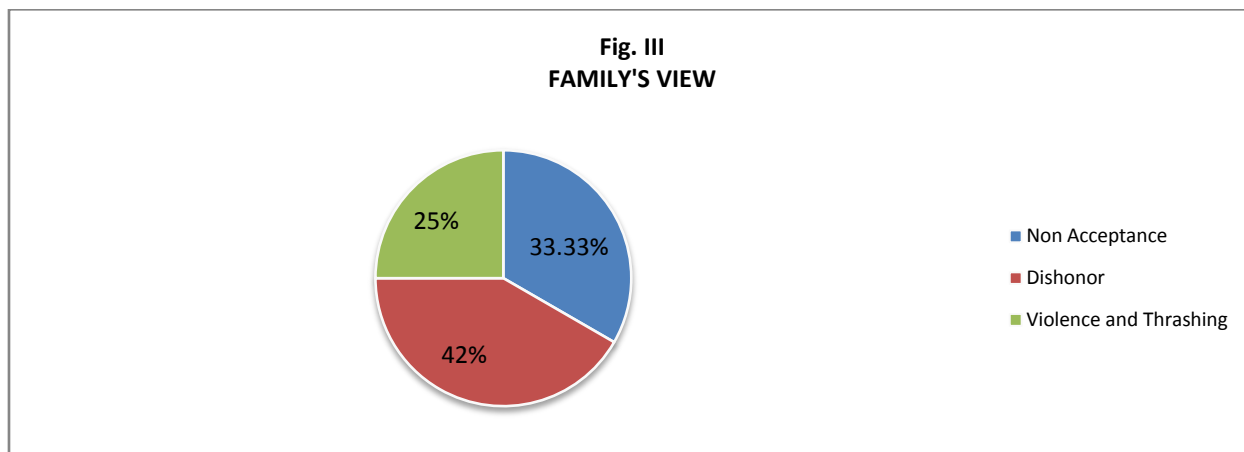
of MSM provides a description of how they are perceived by their family and its respective members below:-

Figure- 4.4 Showing subcategories of Self related to others



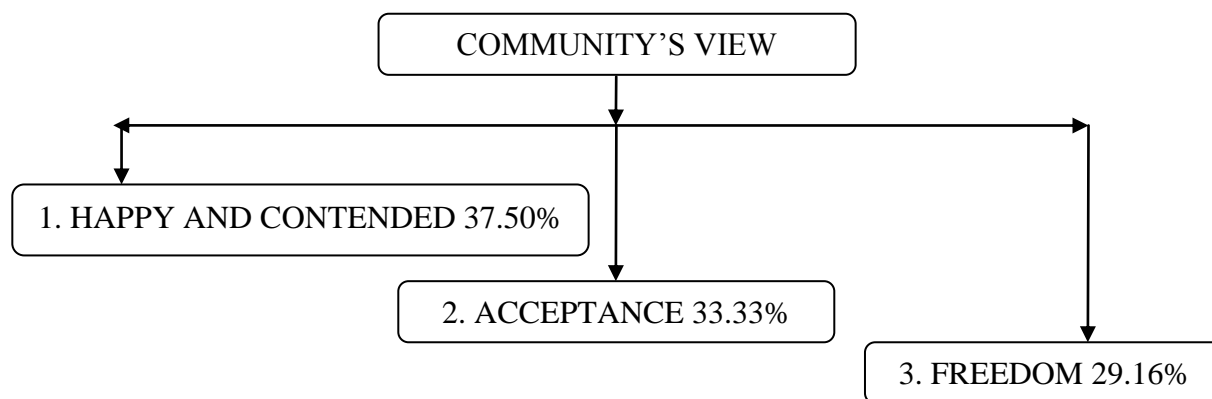
As depicted in Fig. III family's view of MSM was explored under this major category 3 subcategories emerged and the highest score obtained was in **dishonor** with 41.66% which here means अगर यह बात कहीं बाहर किसी को पता चल गयी कि हम ऐसा कुछ करते हैं तो पूरे परिवार कि नाक कट जाएगी और हम किसी को मुँह दिखाने लायक नहीं रह जाएंगे और हम इस समाज का एक धब्बा हैं, following this the next subcategory emerged of **non acceptance** with 33.33% which here means हमारे घर में अगर किसी को पता चल जाए की हम ऐसा कुछ करते हैं तो हमको घर से ही निकाल देंगे और मारेंगे पीटेंगे वो अलग, and finally lowest score obtaining subcategory emerged as **violence and thrashing** with 25% which here means जब हमारे घर वालों को पता चला कि हम छुपकर अपने बॉयफ्रेंड से मिलने जाते हैं तो उन्होंने हमे खूब मारा पीटा और कई-कई दिनों तक कमरे में बंदकर दिया करते थे इन सब वजह के चलते हम घर छोड़कर

भाग गए थे, henceforth, the above mentioned description indicate that the self perception of MSM based on their family's view was negative evident based on the responses observed. The very much probable reason for this finding maybe that families believe in the customary traditions of society that a man should marry a woman as this is what we have been practicing since ages and it is unacceptable that people indulge in similar sex partners as a question arises that how will their family generation grow and since there are stigmas attached to homosexuality so the society will not let them live peacefully. The studies done in this context does not support the findings but they do support the view as indicated in the study done by Mitrani et. al., 2017 that among men whose parents knew of their sexual orientation, rejection of son's sexual orientation from mother and from father was related to higher number of depressive symptoms. Parent reactions were not directly related to safer sex behaviors. Parent attitudes about their son's sexual orientation had an effect on the son's emotional wellbeing and acculturation may play a protective role.



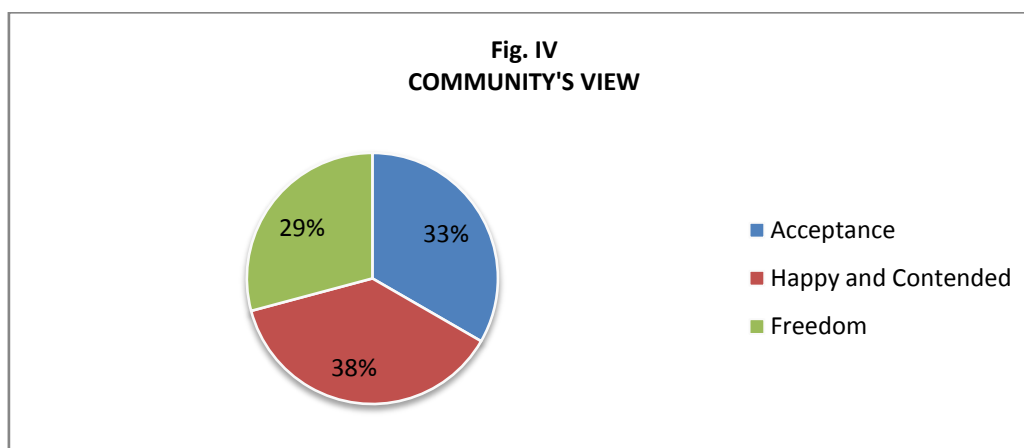
And at last another category named community's view emerged under the major category of self related to others which further included three subcategories which are discussed the Figure 4.5 with percentages. Community's view takes into account the way LGBTQ+ community perceives MSM and how they treat them are mentioned below:-

Figure- 4.5 Showing subcategories of Self related to others



As depicted in Fig. IV community's view of MSM was explored under this major category 3 subcategories emerged the highest score obtained on **Happy and Contented** with 37.50% which here means जब भी हम यहाँ ऑफिस में अपने लोगों के बीच में रहते है तो काफी खुशी महसूस करते है क्योंकि यहाँ पर कोई न गाली देता है और सब एक दुसरे को समझते हैं ऐसा लगता है कि हाँ यह अपना घर है, following the next category emerged as **Acceptance** with 33.33% which here means that हमारी कम्युनिटी काफी अच्छी है यहाँ सब मिलझूलकर रहते हैं एकदुसरे का खयाल करते हैं और सबसे बड़ी बात यह है कि हम जैसे हैं हमको वैसेही अपनाते हैं कभी न कोई बदसलूकी करता है औरनही बुरा बर्ताव और एक दुसरे कि परेशानियों में खड़े रहते हैं, and finally the last subcategory emerged as **Freedom** with 29.16% which here means that अपनों के बीच में रहकर

हम साड़ी पहनकर श्रृंगार करके नाच भी सकते हैं और वो सबकर सकते हैं जो हम करना चाहते हैं बगैर किसी रोक टोक के, henceforth, above mentioned description suggests that self perception among MSM based on their community's view is highly positive evidently observed based on the responses, the very much probable reason for this finding maybe that in LGBTQ+ community majority people have faced certain problems in their lives which they may relate with others and they try to be empathetic with each other and supportive of the life choices which they desire to make thus they allow each member to exercise their free will in order to feel alive and they fight for their community's rights together. The two hunches have been made in the present studyfirst hunch that is the self perception of MSM according to self will be positive is not accepted though the second hunch the self perception of MSM according to others will be negative is accepted.



Thus, to summarize, this review further reveals self perception based on self and others is negative among MSM thus directing towards poor mental health. Nonetheless, there is a lack of mental health services and interventions focusing on MSM in India. Competent and culturally relevant interventions are needed for MSM.

Conclusion And Summary

A qualitative oriented research provides a framework for understanding the experiences of self perception based on self and others by MSM and highlights how policies and programmes should consider the particular and very specific needs of this population when accumulating care, mental health services, and treatment services as to what will be appropriate for them holistically. It is concluded on the basis of results that the self perception of MSM based on self is negative and the self perception of self based on others is negative.

Implications

Provided with the adverse effects of stigma within families and society level interventions are necessary to address prejudice and stigma towards MSM. It is important to facilitate the awareness of biases among others and challenge deeply entrenched stereotypes about MSM.

Therapeutic approaches such as cognitive restructuring and self-affirmation can be implemented to change their negative thought patterns Pachankis, 2014. Developing adaptive emotion regulation skills can enable them to effectively cope with stigmatizing experiences.

In addition, recent research indicates that mindfulness and self-compassion interventions can be used to cultivate a nonjudgmental and accepting attitude toward self and negative experiences, which may mitigate rumination and self-blame, and thereby alleviate mental distress Yang & Mak, 2017

MSM peer support groups may be developed to achieve better psychosocial functioning. By engaging in support groups, it provides an opportunity for MSM to share their experiences and develop fruitful social bonds with peers, which may also serve as a source of support emotionally. The positive outcomes can even be maximized if the support groups are organized around specific identities such as gay men WHO, 2016

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