

Self-Esteem among Men Who Have Sex with Men Living with HIV: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: HIV transmission in males, particularly in Indonesia, is increasing due to increased sexual activity among Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) groups. This is largely due to diminished self-esteem and reluctance to disclose their status, influenced by factors like power, virtue, relevance, and competence. **Aims:** The study investigates the self-esteem of MSM living with HIV and explores the factors that may influence their self-esteem. **Methods:** This study employs a descriptive qualitative study. The study used interviews and content analysis techniques to gather data on HIV individuals at the Public Health Center, specifically focusing on MSM. **Results:** The interview data revealed six themes: individualism, body image dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, lack of peer support, aspiration to be useful, and self-esteem needs. **Conclusion:** The study reveals that self-esteem in HIV-positive men is influenced by coping strategies, body image dissatisfaction, motivation, and peer support. It suggests helping others and enhancing library resources, regular investigations, and a specialized counseling program to improve self-esteem.

Keywords: HIV, MSM, self-esteem, qualitative study

INTRODUCTION

HIV transmission among males who engage in sexual activity with other men (MSM), including homosexual and bisexual men, is increasing in Indonesia. The prevalence of MSM has risen from 20% in 2018 to 27.2% in 2021, a significant increase from 28.8% in 2022 (Arisudhana *et al.*, 2020). This increase is concerning as high-risk sexual behavior significantly impacts the spread of HIV. People living with HIV (PLWH) often face social stigma and discrimination due to their condition (Nyamaruze & Govender, 2020). Men who have sex with men often experience diminished self-esteem and reluctance to disclose their condition, leading to discomfort in social interactions (Nyamaruze & Govender, 2020). The increasing prevalence of MSM in Indonesia underscores the need for increased awareness and support for those affected by HIV.

Self-esteem is an assessment of an individual's self-worth, starting in infancy and evolving due to life experiences. High self-esteem individuals perceive good attributes and strengths, while low self-

esteem focuses on flaws. Self-esteem is crucial for shaping self-concept, especially among those living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), supporting health aspirations, and developing interpersonal openness. PLWHA often undergo a transitional period to acknowledge their illness (Nyamaruze & Govender, 2020). Self-esteem among PLWHA can be viewed from three perspectives: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The affective perspective considers emotions during social adaptation, while the cognitive perspective focuses on problem perception and problem-solving abilities (Saefulloh *et al.*, 2017). A study by (Runiari, 2018) found that HIV/AIDS patients in Jombang district often suffer from low self-esteem due to shame, negative body image, societal role loss, unemployment, and diminished social connections. In Ghana, men who have sex with men (MSM) also experience higher levels of low self-esteem due to embarrassment and depression. (Handayani & Susanti, 2019) found that MSM often feels inferior in social orientation and self-expression. (Nyamaruze & Govender, 2020) found that

MSM may feel inferior due to perceived deviations in their body image, such as ideal body weight and skin conditions. Poor self-esteem can lead to various reactions, including adaptable self-actualization and identity loss (Stuart, 2021). Those with low self-esteem develop a positive self-concept, while those with poor self-esteem struggle to adapt effectively and may experience a diminished sense of identity (Saefulloh *et al.*, 2017). PLWH who identify as men who have sex with men may experience negative consequences due to low self-esteem and negative coping strategies, leading to melancholy, anger, resentment, and intentional disease spread. Poor self-esteem can cause hopelessness, a shift in self-perception, and a lack of self-respect, contributing to depressive symptoms (Arisudhana *et al.*, 2020). This study aims to explore self-esteem among men MSM living with HIV/AIDS. The research focuses on conceptualizing self-esteem among MSM and provides valuable insights for MSM. The study emphasizes the importance of practical experiences to improve the writer's proficiency in evaluating self-esteem in mainstream media. Further research is needed to further advance interventions targeting MSM.

METHODS

Study design

The study employs a qualitative design to comprehend a social phenomenon and its perspectives, utilizing descriptive data from observed behaviors through written or spoken words.

Sample

The study examines men with HIV using purposive sampling, selecting participants over 18 years old based on cooperativeness and positive HIV history, and exclusions include those without a history or decreased consciousness. A total of 6 samples were interviewed following the saturated data.

Data Collection Procedures

An ethical clearance was obtained from STIKEP PPNI Jawa Barat (III/098/KEPK/IV/2023). Research ethics in nursing research involve ethical obligations like obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and maintaining confidentiality to protect

participants' identities and information, as they directly involve human subjects. A researcher conducted a study on men with sex with men living with HIV at a community health center. They used semi-structured interviews to gather data from a balanced sample. The study aimed to understand the experiences of MSM living with HIV/AIDS. The interviews were conducted in 45-to-60 minutes, with an orientation phase, working phase, and termination phase. The data was then analyzed to identify patterns, make informed decisions, and address any unanswered questions.

Data Analysis

Content analysis is a method used by researchers to create impartial descriptions of a subject. It involves formulating research questions, selecting relevant sources, using purposive sampling, systematically examining and interpreting content, and collecting data from a sample document. This study involved selecting, coding, categorizing, identifying themes, and interpreting data based on the proposed theoretical framework (Arafat, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview data revealed six themes: individualism as a coping mechanism, dissatisfaction with body image, lack of motivation in achieving a life goal, lack of peer support, aspiration to be useful, and self-esteem needs.

Theme 1: Individualism as a coping mechanism

The study explores the role of individualism as a coping method, focusing on both positive and maladaptive responses. Participants indicated a greater focus on self-improvement when facing challenges, indicating individualism as a coping mechanism.

Pertains to individuals

Individualistic tendencies are often displayed when faced with a problem, as demonstrated in the following statement.

"... subsequently, there exist individuals who have the propensity to induce negative emotions, thereby justifying the inclination to independently address the issue at hand, refraining from seeking

assistance from external sources..."
(P2, a 20-year-old)

Favorable reaction

The subject prefers exercising as a positive response to problems, as it boosts their energy levels, as expressed in the following statement:

"...When a problem arises, I often find solace in physical activity. By engaging in exercise, I can enhance my energy levels and address the issue more effectively." (P1, 24-year-old)

Pertains to closed selection

The subject often struggles with obtaining sputum samples for laboratory analysis, leading to a closed disposition towards research to subdue their ego, but these difficulties do not cause depression:

"I tend to conceal my problems, but now I suppress them to protect my self-esteem." Per standard protocol, it was necessary to undergo a tuberculosis (TBC) screening before the initial encounter. At that juncture, I began to experience a subtle shift in my emotional state, wherein I perceived a diminished sense of depression and instead experienced a little melancholy" (P5, 22-year-old)

Theme 2: Dissatisfaction with body image

The study identifies factors contributing to body image dissatisfaction, such as diminished self-assurance, dissatisfaction with physical appearance, perceived deviations from societal beauty standards, and unmet attractiveness expectations.

Did not confident

The research participants reported feelings of insecurity due to variations in body image, particularly regarding physical attributes like a leg wound:

"I lack confidence when I wear shorts like that, especially considering the size of my slender physique. It does not bother me, but I feel insecure because of my thinness." (P5, 22-year-old)

Discontentment with body image

The study revealed that the respondent experienced a sense of perpetual inadequacy due to dissatisfaction with their body image, as evidenced by the following statement:

"...When I focus on my body image, I do not feel sufficiently content. For instance, I have a scar (indicating a wound on my leg)." (P3, 22-year-old)

A discernible physical distinction exists

The person has persistent dissatisfaction due to several physical differences, as exemplified by the statement:

"...owing to my slender physique, numerous scars, and the lack of symmetry in my body shape." (P3, 22-year-old)

Physical attractiveness standards that do not align with societal expectations

The individual expresses a lack of confidence in their ability to achieve flawless performance, as evidenced by the following statement:

"...additionally, I experience a sense of inadequacy in presenting myself in well-dressed attire to enhance my appearance." (P3, 22-year-old)

Theme 3: lack of motivation in achieving a life goal

This study explores the role of intention in determining motivation and hope in achieving life objectives. Participants indicated that genuine intentions were crucial for achieving desired outcomes, emphasizing the importance of motivation in achieving goals.

Deficiency in the drive to attain a desired outcome

The participants in this study experienced a decline in motivation to pursue a desired outcome, as expressed in the following statement:

"...thus, I experienced a subsequent loss of motivation, similar to that, where my aspirations seemed within reach, but the following day, the situation was not the same. This pattern occurred most of the time,

and consequently, I had to rely on my efforts to regain motivation and pursue my goals..." (P5, 22-year-old)

Intention plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of endeavors

The individual asserts that genuine intentions are crucial to accomplishing a goal. This sentiment is expressed in the following statement:

"...if, for instance, there is a particular objective that one aspires to attain, it is imperative to revisit the initial intention behind desiring its achievement. If, upon reflection, it becomes evident that the intention was not genuine from the outset, then the time invested in pursuing said goal has been rendered futile. Consequently, the individual's current aspiration is to regain composure and redirect attention towards the necessary action." (P4, 25-year-old)

Theme 4: Lack Of Peer Support

The study revealed a lack of peer support, leading to undervaluation and inadequate treatment. Participants reported feeling disliked by their peers and only receiving favorable treatment when they expressed their thoughts.

Underappreciated

The subjects under investigation in this research are frequently undervalued, as indicated by the following statement:

"...often underestimated by individuals and individuals exhibit a lack of trust in my abilities..." (P4, 25-year-old)

Poor treatment

The individual experiences unfavorable treatment from their peers, as indicated by the statement:

"...specifically due to factors that diminish self-esteem, it is evident that my friends do not satisfactorily treat me..." (P1, 24-year-old)

Disliked by acquaintances

The individual perceives a sense of animosity from their acquaintances due to their tendency to consume installments, as expressed in the following statement:

"...I possess a proclivity for consuming installments, which engenders disdain towards me..." (P4, 25-year-old)

Theme 5: trying to be a useful person

The endeavor to be helpful individuals within the context of this study encompasses bestowing advantages upon others. Participants in the study expressed their desire to persist in their efforts to be helpful individuals, as they believed it had the potential to augment their self-esteem.

Bestowing advantages to others

The individual consistently strives to be a person of utility, as evidenced by the following statement:

"I possess the ability to provide value to others, positively impact individuals, and influence them. I derive a sense of worth from my capacity to assist others and dedicate my time to their needs." (P4, 25-year-old)

The subject further expounded upon the principles of reciprocity in interpersonal interactions, as seen by the following extract from the interview:

"... individuals engage in a reciprocal exchange of resources, whereby they both receive and provide support. For instance if I am treated kindly by the community, I reciprocate that kindness..." (P4, 25-year-old)

Theme 6: The need for self-esteem

The present study incorporates self-esteem needs, encompassing emotions, cognitions, and autonomy, as essential for navigating various challenges.

Emotions

The patient experiences a sense of worth when they can contribute positively to others, as expressed in the following statement:

"I feel a sense of value when I can assist individuals." (P4, 25-year-old)

Epistemological beliefs

The individual expresses confidence in their ability to successfully navigate

and overcome the various challenges they encounter, as seen by the statement:

"...I am confident in my capacity to navigate this trial successfully, and..."
(P3, 22-year-old)

Autonomy

The individual has the belief that they can successfully attain a particular objective without any assistance from others, as indicated by the statement:

"...engaging in solitary efforts, others don't have to be aware of this endeavor." (P3, 22-year-old)

The study reveals that individuals with HIV/AIDS use various coping strategies to manage anxiety, including internalizing emotions and experiencing heightened anxiety during examination. These strategies include individual capabilities, social support networks, material resources, and positive personal beliefs. Inadequate anxiety management can lead to dangerous behavior and decreased self-esteem (Stuart, 2021). Participants with HIV/AIDS also express dissatisfaction with their body image, leading to decreased self-confidence. This disparity affects their perception of their ideal selves and may result in skin disorders causing sores and discomfort.

The study reveals that HIV/AIDS patients' primary life goal is treatment, but lack of desire and commitment hinders its realization. They experience a dynamic psychological state, fluctuating between hope, resilience, stress, depression, and inadequacy. Internal variables can cause discontent and psychological tension, impacting their well-being (Remien *et al.*, 2019). The study revealed that lack of peer support can lead to adverse treatment, social ostracism, and feelings of inferiority among individuals, which is consistent

with previous research suggesting that social support can enhance self-esteem and mitigate depression in men with HIV, resulting in similar psychological well-being to those without HIV (Pardede *et al.*, 2020; Purnamawati *et al.*, 2022), which suggests that social support can enhance self-esteem among men with sex with men living with HIV and mitigate depression. Elevated self-esteem in individuals with HIV can lead to similar psychological well-being as those without HIV.

The study investigates the impact of HIV/AIDS on self-esteem in individuals with the condition. It suggests that these individuals often engage in behaviors to boost their self-esteem, such as showing kindness and providing support during treatment. The research also reveals that these individuals prioritize their personal lives, leading to increased social withdrawal and a reduced tendency to self-reflection about their positive attributes (Runiari, 2018). This is particularly evident in those recently diagnosed with HIV. The study explores self-esteem in people with low self-esteem in PLWHA, revealing that they prioritize their personal lives, leading to increased social withdrawal and external influence. This low self-esteem reduces self-reflection about positive attributes, especially in this population.

The study investigates self-esteem among MSM living with HIV using an interview methodology. It aims to identify potential self-esteem issues using a learning model, which serves as a screening tool for those susceptible to severe psychological difficulties. Early-life low self-esteem levels can prevent depression in individuals with HIV, enabling holistic nursing management that considers biological, social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Future research should explore factors impacting self-esteem among individuals with HIV.

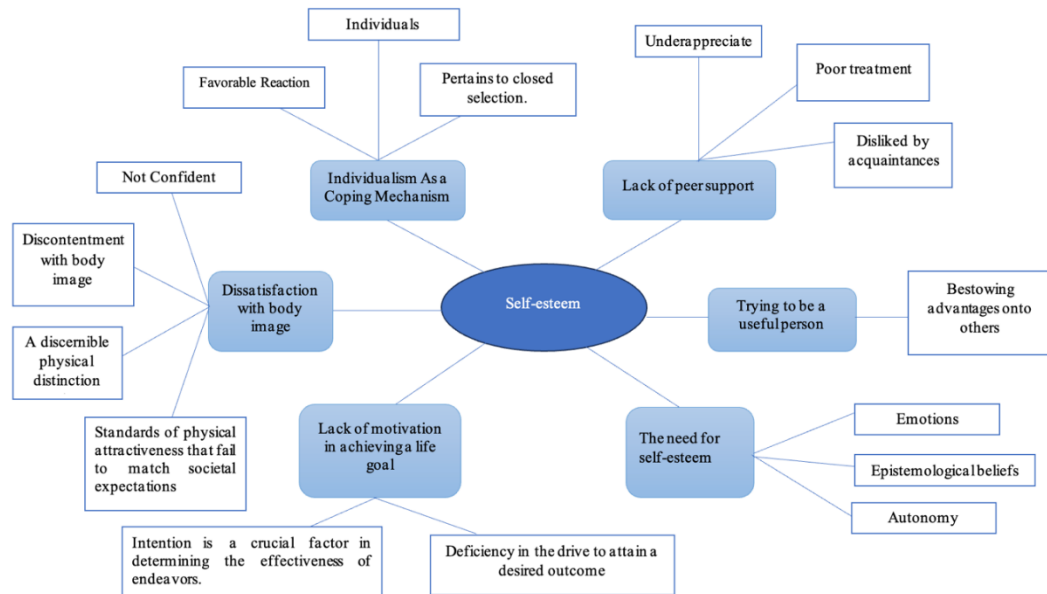


Figure 1. Thematic theme

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the self-esteem of HIV-positive men with sex with men is influenced by individual coping strategies, body image dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, and peer support. It suggests that individuals can improve their self-esteem by helping others rather than enduring negative peer experiences. Educational institutions should enhance library resources by incorporating case studies on self-esteem in HIV-affected men. The Community Health Center should conduct regular investigations into self-esteem, focusing on HIV-positive individuals. A specialized counseling program is recommended to foster self-esteem among HIV-positive MSM. Future research should explore the specific self-esteem requirements of HIV-affected individuals to better understand self-esteem determinants.

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