

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In May 2003, Smart Strategic Services was engaged by Queensland Health to undertake a research project into rural, remote and socially-isolated gay, bisexual and other homosexually active men who have sex with men (MSM).

The study arose from the perception by Queensland Health that, although the situation of gay-identifying men in major metropolitan cities was well-understood and the needs of these men catered for, there was another group of men engaging in homosexual behaviour throughout the State. Their needs were not understood, and services did not currently provide for them.

The propose of the study was therefore to engage in social inquiry of key respondents, supported by a quantitative survey, to provide insights into the situation and needs of this group, leading to recommendations about how sexual health messages could be delivered more appropriately to them.

4.2 Locations

Although it was recognised that socially-isolated MSMs might be found in inner-Brisbane, Queensland Health initially intended to focus the project on areas other than Brisbane and the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. After further discussion, it was decided to include the hinterland behind the Gold Coast, and the Sunshine Coast other than the Noosa – Perugian – Coolum corridor. Locations subsequently visited for interviews were Toowoomba, Nambour, Maryborough, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Cairns and Mt Isa (and their surrounds)

4.3 Recruiting strategy

It was realised at the outset that this would be a very difficult group to reach. We expected that many MSMs wouldn't want to talk to the researchers: if we were in their position, we probably wouldn't want to talk to the researchers, either.

Incentives were ruled out: to claim (let alone use) an incentive, MSMs would have had to identify themselves (as in, "Honey, guess what, I won a trip for two interstate for talking about how I have sex with men").

One other survey has used mailouts in adult bookshop mailings. This appeared to us likely to reach a particularly skewed sample: open about their sexuality (if not their homosexuality), mail order clients and actively engaged in sex.

The recruiting strategy instead was twofold:

- interview key informants who know about regional, remote and isolated MSMs from personal and professional contacts, and ask them to speak on behalf on these men
- recruit as many regional, remote and isolated MSMs as possible through newspaper advertising, cards and posters placed at beats, word of mouth, through local contacts and through websites used by regional, remote and isolated MSMs.

4.4 Key informant interviews

34 people were interviewed as key informants, including:

- men and women
- Indigenous men
- sexual health workers
- men married with children
- well-connected gay men
- a proprietor of a sex on premises venue
- a policeman
- volunteers in community services.

Interviews were conducted in person in ten locations throughout regional, remote and isolated Queensland, with further interviews conducted by phone.

The material gained, while valuable, is anecdotal, because it comes from asking people to comment on the position of other people. While we acknowledge the difficulties and issues with this approach, it was considered valid in this case because:

- a number of those interviewed were regional, remote and isolated MSMs who don't identify as gay
- a number of others had only recently begun to identify as gay, or would identify to us as gay but had only done so to a small number of people
- the remainder had ongoing and close dealings with the target group.

4.5 The survey

The second tool was a survey questionnaire which could be completed via the project website, by calling a toll-free number, or by completing a printed copy. The first two opportunities were widely advertised in the personals sections of regional newspapers, and through a wide range of other means. Printed copies of the questionnaire were made available to sexual health coordinators, sexual health workers and others, and through them to interested parties.

4.5.1 Numbers completed

341 surveys were completed, or part-completed with useful information. One from outback NSW, one from ACT and one from Victoria were not included, nor were surveys from the Gold Coast and Brisbane areas. 284 surveys were included in the final analysis.

Based on the experience of the telephone interviewers, we believe that a significant number of people had two or more goes at doing the survey by phone; and the same might be expected for the Internet. Therefore, the 284 responses do not represent 284 individuals, but a smaller

number. We have no way of saying how many individuals they represent, because we did not seek any identifying information from respondents.

TABLE 1: REASONS FOR TERMINATING INTERVIEW AFTER INITIAL EXPLANATION

Reasons for surveys terminating after initial explanation	No.
Wanted to speak to someone/counsellor, but not do survey	12
No reason / not interested	9
Decided to call later	8
On a landline (4)	
Wanted to call later, no reason (1)	
When he had the time (3)	
Cut-off, line dropped out during survey	7
Terminated before completing, no reason	6
Caller wanted sex discussion / thought it was a sex line / line to meet men	5
Out of area	3
Was originally not sure what the newspaper ad was about / did not realise it was a survey	3
Wrong number	3
Would not do survey with a woman	1

4.5.2 Limitations of the survey data

The survey was designed with the clear understanding that it would be difficult if at all possible to gain a representative sample of men who have sex with men, but who do not necessarily identify as gay.

Firstly, this is because:

- many keep their sexual behaviour a secret, and will not identify as MSMs to others unless they are likely to get sex from it
- many, as the report explains, live in states of denial about their behaviour and identity
- many are simply not motivated to talk to researchers.

We were aware throughout the research that men from the target group knew of the study, but didn't want to talk. As one local contact said:

I've had a couple of guys who have called here, and I've asked them to do your questionnaire, and their response has been, "Sorry, not interested".

Secondly, the sample size is too small to project the figures onto the general regional, remote and isolated MSM population with confidence.

Thirdly, the whole notion of who identifies as gay / homosexual is complex and involved (as this report shows) and, for example, excluding men who identify as gay from the sample begs many of the question this report tries to answer.

Fourthly, it is a conclusion of this and other reports that MSMs 'are everywhere', and are indistinguishable by demographic or physical characteristics from men generally. A representative sample approach would therefore involve choosing a male general population

Queensland men who have sex with men research report - Prepared by Smart Strategic Services Pty Ltd - www.smartss.com.au - Page 3

sample, and reducing it to men who have sex with men by preliminary questioning, in the process overcoming all the barriers men might have to self-disclosure. This approach would require a budget many times what was available for this project.

Accordingly, while numbers have been published in the tables, they cannot be said to be definitive for regional, remote and isolated MSMs. Rather, readers should look at them qualitatively rather than quantitatively: they support hypotheses and suggest directions, rather than accurately quantify proportions of people.

4.5.3 Interpretation of the data tables

Table 5 below shows the Indigenous status of respondents. As with all tables, a number of respondents did not answer the question. With some questions, the non-response rate is quite significant. Accordingly, the percentage figure is only a percentage of the total responses, not the total survey respondents. This was felt to provide the most accurate snapshot of the proportions of the sample choosing each option.

TABLE 5: IF RESPONDENT IS OF ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORIGIN

ATSI	No.	%
Yes	9	3%
No	267	97%
No answer	8	
Total	284	

The table below is an extract from Table 10. Since respondents usually nominated a number of locations, the percentage is for the total number of respondents, but there is no total provided for the 'No.' column, as this would be meaningless.

EXTRACT FROM TABLE 10: WHERE RESPONDENTS MET OTHER MEN FOR SEX IN THE PAST YEAR

Where met?	No.	%
Internet	89	31%
Outdoor cruising area	87	31%
Friends / past sex partners	84	30%
Gay bar / club / pub	69	24%
Private party	69	24%
Non-gay bar / club / pub	57	20%
Sauna for men's sex	53	19%
Adult bookshop or sex club	42	15%

4.5.4 Characteristics of survey respondents

Table 1 shows the age of respondents. They tended to be fairly evenly-distributed from 18 to 50.

FIGURE 1: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

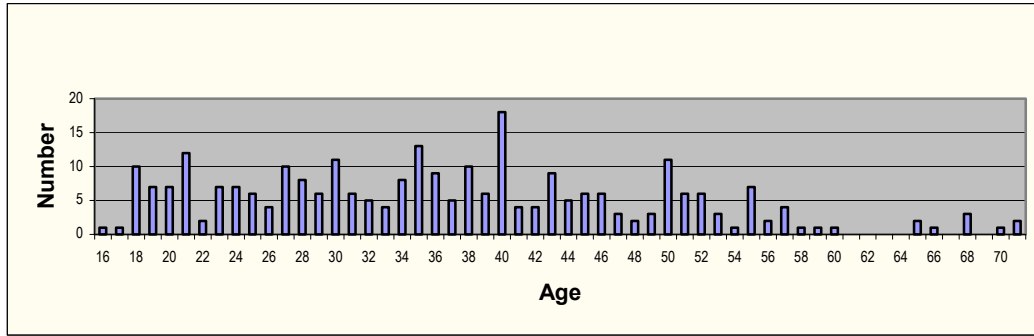


Table 2 shows the postcodes of respondents. They tended to be concentrated around the major cities

TABLE 2: POSTCODE OF RESPONDENTS

Postcode	Location	No.	Postcode	Location	No.
4275	LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK	1	4670	BUNDABERG	5
4285	BEAUDESERT	1	4680	GLADSTONE	11
4300	BELLBIRD PARK	1	4700	ROCKHAMPTON	9
4305	BASIN POCKET	3	4701	ROCKHAMPTON	13
4306	AMBERLEY	1	4702	KEPPEL SANDS	1
4311	BUARABA SOUTH	1	4703	YEPPON	1
4341	KENSINGTON GROVE	3	4710	ZILZIE	1
4345	GATTON COLLEGE	1	4720	EMERALD	1
4347	GRANTHAM	1	4721	CLERMONT	1
4350	TOOWOOMBA	28	4737	ARMSTRONG BEACH	1
4352	AMIENS	1	4740	MACKAY	5
4360	NOBBY	1	4741	WHITSUNDAYS	1
4370	WARWICK	3	4744	MORANBAH	1
4410	JANDOWAE	1	4745	DYSART	1
4455	ROMA	1	4754	BENHOLME	1
4487	ST GEORGE	1	4800	PROSERPINE	2
4500	BRENDALE	1	4802	AIRLIE BEACH	1
4510	CABOOLTURE	2	4807	AYR	1
4512	WAMURAN	2	4808	BRANDON	1
4551	CALOUNDRA	1	4810	TOWNSVILLE	16
4557	MOOLOOLABA	1	4811	JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY	1
4559	WOOMBYE	1	4812	HERMIT PARK	5
4560	NAMBOUR	2	4814	AITKENVALE	5
4562	EUMUNDI	1	4816	GREENVALE	3
4563	COOROY	1	4817	ALICE RIVER	3
4567	NOOSA HEADS	2	4825	MOUNT ISA	14
4568	POMONA	3	4869	EDMONTON	1
4570	GYMPIE	3	4870	CAIRNS	28
4573	COOLUM BEACH	1	4871	ALMADEN	4
4575	BUDDINA	1	4872	BARRINE	2

4580	TIN CAN BAY	1
4612	HIVESVILLE	1
4625	GAYNDAH	1
4650	MARYBOROUGH	8
4655	HERVEY BAY	14
4660	CHILDERS	1

4873	DAINTREE	2
4878	BARRON	2
4879	CLIFTON BEACH	3
4880	MAREEBA	2
4883	ATHERTON	1
Unknown		37
Total		284

Table 3 shows the highest education level of survey respondents. The highest level of sex in ten respondents was Year 11 or 12.

TABLE 3: RESPONDENT'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

Education	No.	%
Primary	4	1%
Years 7-10	65	23%
Years 11-12	99	36%
Apprenticeship or traineeship	32	12%
Diploma, degree or higher	78	28%
No answer	6	
Total	284	

Table 4 shows the work or study situation of respondents in the week before doing the survey.

TABLE 4: RESPONDENT'S WORK OR STUDY SITUATION LAST WEEK

Work	No.	%
Student	21	8%
Unemployed	34	12%
Employed full-time	134	48%
Employed part-time	39	14%
Self-employed	22	8%
Medically retired	13	5%
Other retired	14	5%
None	7	
Total	284	

Table 5 shows the Indigenous status of respondents, with 3% identifying as Indigenous.

TABLE 5: IF RESPONDENT IS OF ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORIGIN

ATSI	No	%
Yes	9	3%
No	267	97%

No answer	8	
Total	284	

Table 6 shows who the respondent has had sex with the past year. Half had only had sex with a man, and almost half with a woman or a man dressed as a woman.

TABLE 6: WHO RESPONDENTS HAD SEX WITH IN LAST YEAR

In last year, who?	No	%
Men	137	51%
More men than women	45	17%
More women than men	53	20%
Women	14	5%
Cross dresser	10	4%
No sex	11	4%
No answer	14	
Total	284	

Table 7 shows who respondents are having regular sex with. Four in ten have only homosexual sex. One in ten only had heterosexual sex. Almost a quarter regularly have sex with men and women. Almost a third don't have regular sex.

TABLE 7: WHO RESPONDENTS ARE HAVING REGULAR SEX WITH

Regular sex with ...	No.	%
Man only	108	39%
Woman only	25	9%
Man and woman	61	22%
Not regularly having sex	86	31%
No answer	4	
Total	284	

4.6 Other

Some claims, in particular about rates of HIV infection from oral sex, are included in this report as reported by respondents. The researchers do not endorse any claim made by any respondent, or vouch for its accuracy or authenticity. Quotations by respondents are included to illustrate or dramatise a point, not to provide valid facts.