

Sexual Behaviors and Networks in Thimphu, Bhutan: A Rapid Assessment

INTRODUCTION AND ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Background and Overview

Available evidence indicates that the prevalence of HIV in Bhutan remains low. However, there are indications of vulnerability. A recent general population survey found that the prevalence of conventional STIs is high. Moreover, there are aspects of the sexual structure in Bhutan that could lead to expansion of the HIV epidemic, including pockets of commercial sex, international migration and cross-border networks (with India), and in some locales, at least anecdotal reports of relatively common practice of multi-partner concurrent sexual networks. At this relatively early stage the impact of the HIV epidemic can likely be kept at a low level if the appropriate prevention strategies are chosen, targeted appropriately, and implemented at scale with sufficient quality. Therefore, the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) of the Government of Bhutan plans to select and target prevention strategies appropriately, and to build the capacity of key personnel involved in HIV/AIDS programming to conduct rapid appraisals to support prevention program planning.

A pilot rapid situation assessment was carried out in Thimphu by the Centre for Global Public Health (CGPH), University of Manitoba, Canada with the funding support from Government of Bhutan during October 2009 to January 2010.

Project Goal and Objectives

The overall goal of this assessment was to develop and test field methods designed to assess the location and nature of sexual behaviours and networks in urban settings in Bhutan. In addition, the project aimed to train NACP personnel and others in the implementation, analysis and interpretation of these methodologies.

The primary objectives of the assessment were as follows:

1. To identify and characterize the key venues and locales in Thimphu where people meet new sexual partners.
2. To identify and characterize non-location based ways in which people meet new sexual partners, especially commercial sex partners
3. To describe the sexual behaviours and networking patterns at key venues and locales in Thimphu.

Secondary objectives of the project were:

1. To develop, test and fine-tune rapid assessment methods for assessing the structure of casual sexual networking in urban areas of Bhutan.

2. To build the capacity of key personnel and community members to implement rapid assessment methods.

Methods

Project Setting and Key Outputs

The assessments were carried out in the city of Thimphu, Bhutan. The total timeframe for the project will be two months, from November 1 to December 31, 2009. The study has the following key outputs:

- A compiled methodology, including field guides and data collection instruments.
- An integrated report describing the methodology and key findings of the project.

Study design and process

The study consisted of four main components:

1. Documentation and description of key venues and locales, including public places, that serve as places that facilitate the formation and maintenance of sexual networks.
2. Quantitative research to describe key sexual behaviours among those who participate in high risk sexual networks.
3. Qualitative research to describe the social context related to the formation of sexual networks, and to describe the nature of sexual partnering and networks.

Ethical Considerations

Study personnel were trained in the ethical conduct of research. Information was collected from participants after informed consent is obtained and documented (see consent form). Personally identifiable information were not kept, but rather a system of coding was employed to maintain confidentiality. All data collected were retained in secure premises by the study coordinator.

PROFILE OF VENUES

Methods

A total of 10 field researchers were trained to map and profile all the different venues, including the public places in Thimphu city, where men and women would congregate. The researchers used a structured interview schedule (Appendix A) to collect information from key informant interviewers including the venue managers, workers and patrons.

Coverage

A total of 205 venues, including 118 (58%) bars/restaurants, 31 (15%) public places, 18 (9%) each of hotels/restaurants and karaoke, and 10 (5%) each of Discos and Cafes were profiled.

Key informants

The information for this profiling was collected from a total of 344 (about 2 per venue) key informants, including venue managers (34%), venue patrons (33%), workers at the venue (26%) and others (6%). 46% of the key informants at these venues were women.

Type of services offered at the venues

A large proportion of the venues offer services like alcohol (78%), and food (59%). While about 16% of the venues provide services of Karaoke or live performance, 5% also provides disco at the venues. 27% of the venues, mainly public places, provide various other services (Table 1).

Total	205
Services offered	
Food	58.9
Alcohol	78.7
Karaoke	10.2
Live performance	6.1
Accommodation	8.1
Disco	5.1
Others	27.4
Missing	3.9

Busy days and timings

The functional days, peak days and timing of operation vary by type of venues. While most of the bars/restaurants, Coffee shops/hotels and public places operate on all the seven days in a week, the disco bars are providing services only on specific days. Most of the disco clubs operate only on three days in a week. Usually, the disco clubs get huge volume of patrons on week days. The peak days for Karaoke are often the weekends. The bars/restaurants operate on all the 7 days, although most gets the maximum crowd during the weekends, including Fridays.

Congregation size at the venues

A total of 12,228 persons visit these venues on a typical day, compared with 17,413 persons visiting during the peak day, indicating a 42% increase on busy days (Table 2). The **turnover** of patrons (ratio of the number on peak day over the number on typical day) is the lowest (1.27) in public places and highest (1.85) in cafes/ hotels/ restaurants.

Table 2: Congregation size at venues

	No of venues	Normal day						Busy day					
		Men		Women		Total		Men		Women		Total	
		Number	Mean	Number	Mean	Number	Mean	Number	Mean	Number	Mean	Number	Mean
Total	205	6492	32	5736	28	12228	60	9729	48	7684	37	17413	85
Type of venue													
Bar/restaurant	118	2442	21	1498	13	3939	33	3660	31	2292	19	5952	50
Cafe/coffee	10	216	22	206	21	421	42	369	37	410	41	780	78
Public places	31	2708	90	3374	109	6082	199	3861	129	3864	125	7725	253
Hotel/restaurant	18	393	22	265	15	657	37	719	40	492	27	1210	67
Karaoke	18	479	27	196	11	674	37	707	39	298	17	1005	56
Disco	10	256	26	199	20	455	45	413	41	328	33	742	74

The **average number of patrons** per venue is 60 on a typical day and 85 on a peak day. As expected, the average number visiting public places is the highest (199 on typical day and 253 on a busy day), the average in other venues ranging from 33-45 on typical day and 50-78 on busy day.

Overall, 54% of the patrons visiting these venues on a typical day are men, and this proportion does not change much on busy days (56%). Greater proportions of men visit karaoke bars (71%) and bars/restaurants (62%). More than half of the patrons in Cafes and public places are women.

Venue patrons seeking sexual partners

Overall, 40% of the venues reported that **men seeking female sexual partners** visit them, and Discos, Karaoke, and public places are more likely to receive such men visitors (Tables 3 and 4). A total of 577 men seeking female sexual partners are reported to visit these 85 venues; 38% visit bars/restaurants, 30% visit public places, 17% visit Karaoke, and 9% visit Discos. The average number of men seeking female sexual partners per venue is 7, ranging from 3 in hotels/restaurants to 10 each in public places, Karaoke and Discos.

Type of venue	Number of venues	Men pick women	Men pick men	Women pick men
Bar/restaurant	118	33.9	4.3	31.0
Cafe/coffee	10	30.0	10.0	40.0
Public places	31	51.6	0.0	46.7
Hotel/restaurant	17	35.3	0.0	5.9
Karaoke	18	55.6	0.0	61.1
Disco	9	66.7	11.1	77.8
Total	203	39.9	3.5	36.5

The proportion of men seeking female sexual partners to the total male patrons on a typical day is 8%, and this proportion ranges from 5% in hotels/restaurants to around 20% in karaoke and Discos.

Overall, 37% of the venues reported that **women seeking male sexual partners** visit them, and Discos, Karaoke, and public places are more likely to receive such women visitors. A total of 476

women seeking male sexual partners are reported to visit these 81 venues; 50% visit

bars/restaurants, 19% visit public places, 18% visit Karaoke, and 9% visit Discos. The average number of women seeking male sexual partners per venue is 6, ranging from 2 in hotels/restaurants to 7-8 in Karaoke and Discos.

Table 4: Number of persons visiting venues to pick up sexual partners, by type of venue

Type of venue	Number of venues	# of men visit to pick women		Number of venues	# of men visit to pick men		Number of venues	# of women visit to pick men	
		Total	Average/venue		Total	Average/venue		Total	Average/venue
Bar/restaurant	44	218	5	24	16	1	43	237	6
Cafe/coffee	3	20	7	2	4	2	4	17	4
Public places	17	172	10	6	0	0	16	92	6
Hotel/restaurant	6	20	3	0	0	0	1	2	2
Karaoke	10	98	10	3	2	1	11	86	8
Disco	5	49	10	0	0	0	6	42	7
Total	85	577	7	35	22	1	81	476	6

The proportion of women seeking male sexual partners to the total female patrons on a typical day is also 8%, and this proportion ranges from less than 1% in hotels/restaurants to around 44% in karaoke bars.

Overall, only 4% of the venues reported that **men seeking male sexual partners** visit them, and cafes, Discos, and bars are more likely to receive such men visitors. None of the public places, hotels/restaurants, and Karaoke bars reported such male visitors. Only about 22 men seeking male sexual partners are reported to visit these 22 venues; the majority visit bars/restaurants.

Overall, 36% of the venues reported that **female sex workers (FSW)** visit them, and Discos, Karaoke, and public places are more likely to receive FSW (Table 5). A total of 266 and 388 FSWs are reported to visit these 90 venues on a typical day and on peak days, respectively. Of the 266 FSW 38% visit bars/restaurants, 22% visit public places, 13% visit Karaoke, and 16% visit Discos. The average number of women seeking male sexual partners per venue is 3, ranging from 2 in bars/restaurants to 5 in Discos.

Table 5: Percent distribution venues reporting FSW visitors, and the number of FSWs visiting the venues on normal and peak days, by type of venue

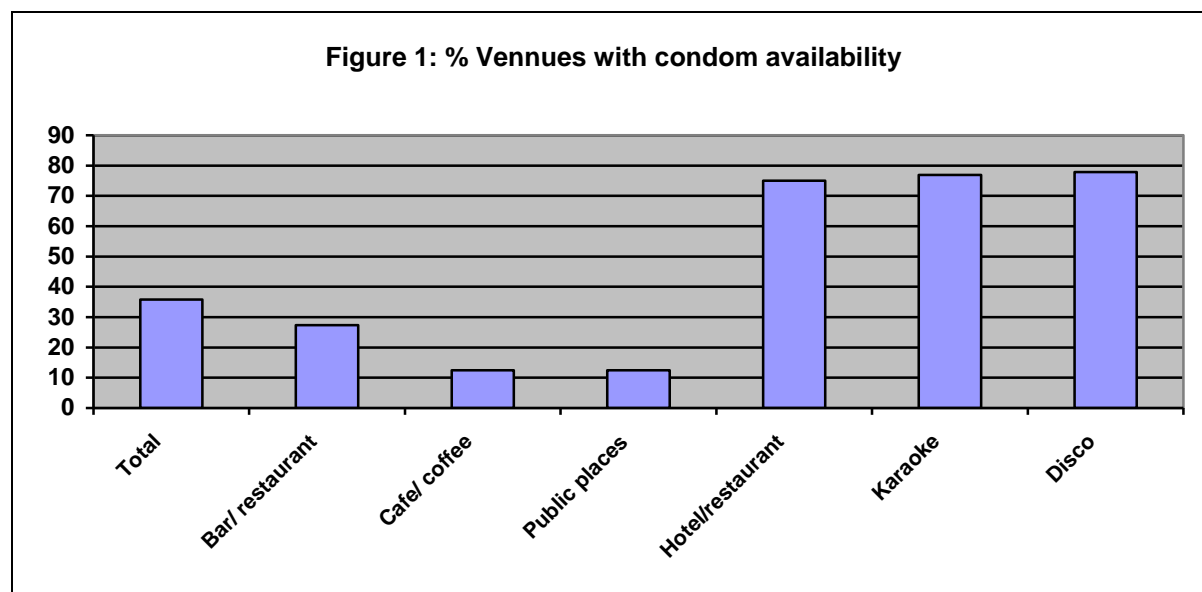
Type of venue	Number of venues	% venues FSWs visit	Number of venues	# of FSWs on a normal day		# of FSWs on a peak day	
				Number	Average	Number	Average
Bar/restaurant	115	27.8	43	102	2	151	3
Cafe/coffee	10	30.0	5	17	3	17	3
Public places	29	55.2	19	59	3	98	5
Hotel/restaurant	18	16.7	3	10	3	13	4
Karaoke	18	55.6	12	35	3	54	4
Disco	9	88.9	8	44	5	56	7
Total	199	36.2	90	266	3	388	4

The proportion of FSW to the total female patrons on a typical day is also 5%, and this proportion ranges from 2% in public places to 18-22% in karaoke and disco bars (Table 6).

Type of venue	Estimated women visiting the venue		% female clients are FSWs	
	Usual day	Peak day	Usual day	Peak day
	Bar/restaurant	1498	2292	6.8
Cafe/coffee	206	410	8.3	4.1
Public places	3374	3864	1.7	2.5
Hotel/restaurant	265	492	3.8	2.6
Karaoke	196	298	17.9	18.0
Disco	199	328	22.1	17.0
Total	5736	7684	4.6	5.0

Condom availability at Venues

Information on condom availability was available for 165 venues, of which 36% reported that condom vending machines are available at the venue. Condoms are available in most (over 70%) of the hotels/restaurants, karaoke and disco bars and in only 12% of the public places, condoms are available (Figure 1).



Implications

- The mapping estimates a total of around 260 venue-based FSWs on a typical day and around 390 FSWs on a busy day in Thimphu.

- It is also estimated that about 580 men visit different venues on a typical day seeking female sexual partners, about 470 women visit seeking male sexual partners.
- The proportion of men and women seeking sexual partners to the total patrons of these venues is about 8%. However, the survey of sexual behaviour among the patrons can be used to determine the exact proportion of high-risk men and women visiting these venues (see next section on survey results).
- Not all venues mapped receive persons seeking sexual partners, Karaoke and disco bars, as well as bars/restaurants are more likely to receive such persons.
- Need to consider public places as potential areas of congregation of high-risk individuals, and prevention activities including condom availability in these areas could be initiated.

RISK PROFILES OF INDIVIDUALS AT VENUES

Sampling of venues and respondents

From the 205 venues profiled during the mapping, a sample of 56 venues was selected using the following criteria:

- Venues with 5 or more FSWs visiting the venue on a typical day or 10 or more individuals seeking sexual partners (men seeking women, women seeking men plus men seeking men)

The total target sample with completed questionnaires was fixed at 480, including a non-response rate of 20%. The number of male and female patrons to be interviewed at each selected venue was also fixed, as per the proportion of men and women seeking sexual partners at these venues, as per the venue profiles.

The data collection at each venue was carried out on peak days and times as reported during venue profiling. Within the venue, the respondent patrons were selected by randomly interviewing a person at each table, till the target samples for that venue were completed.

The targeted and achieved samples by type of venue are provided in Table 7:

Type of venue	# of venues profiled	# venues sampled	# of respondents targeted	# of completed interviews achieved
Bar and restaurant	118	24	239	209
Café/Coffee bar/Hotel	28	7	22	31
Karaoke	18	10	94	109
Disco	10	5	55	64
Public places	31	10	69	72
Total	205	56	481	485

In addition to the sample survey, a total of 69 men and 83 women patrons of the select venues were also given a self-administered questionnaire, which was thought to reduce the social desirability biases in reporting sexual behaviours in a face to face interview. The result from this part of the study is referenced as a comparison for questions that were similar in face to face interview and self-administered questionnaire.

Socio-demographic profile of respondents

The profile of respondents is provided in Table 8. A total of 485 respondents were interviewed, 44% females and 56% males. As expected, the most respondents (44%) were the patrons at bars/restaurants, closely followed by Karaoke (23%), public places (15%) and discos (13%).

Age

A substantial proportion of the respondents (36%) were under age 25, with a mean age of 27 years – the female respondents were somewhat younger than their male counterparts (mean age being 26 and 28 years, respectively). Respondents in Discos were the youngest, with an average age of 24 years; and those in public places were the oldest, with an average age of 30 years.

Literacy and education

Majority (82%) of the respondents is literate, and this proportion is relatively smaller for females than males (77% versus 85%). The patrons in Karaoke are relatively more likely to be illiterate (23%). 54% of the respondents have completed 10 years of schooling, and this proportion is similar among males and female, and across different venue types, except the public places, where a relatively smaller proportion have completed this level of schooling.

Occupation

Overall, 16% of the respondents (19% of males and 13% of females) are labourers, and they are more likely to be found in Café/Coffee Bars/Hotels (23%) and public places (21%). 12% of male and 16% of female respondents are engaged in business

Background characteristic	Total	Sex		Venue type				
		Male	Female	Bar and restaurant	Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	Karaoke	Disco	Public places
<u>Age</u>								
<25 years	35.9	32.0	40.8	34.0	35.5	36.7	60.9	18.1
25+ years	64.1	68.0	59.2	66.0	64.5	63.3	39.1	81.9
Mean age	27.1	27.8	26.2	27.1	26.8	27.6	23.9	29.6
<u>Literacy and Education</u>								
Illiterate	18.4	14.8	23.3	19.4	16.7	23.1	12.9	14.1
Upto 9 years schooling	27.7	30.3	24.3	25.7	26.7	21.3	29.0	42.3
10+ years schooling	53.9	55.0	52.4	54.9	56.7	55.6	58.1	43.7
<u>Occupation</u>								
Labourer	16.3	18.8	13.1	14.8	22.6	15.6	14.1	20.8
Business/trade	13.6	12.1	15.5	13.4	12.9	15.6	15.6	9.7
Government employee	19.8	19.1	20.7	24.9	12.9	17.4	18.8	12.5
Clerical/salesman	9.3	8.8	9.9	7.2	19.4	11.0	12.5	5.6
Housewife	5.8	0.7	12.2	5.3	3.2	6.4	1.6	11.1
Student	11.1	12.1	9.9	12.9	9.7	9.2	14.1	6.9
Self employed	8.7	9.9	7.0	9.1	9.7	7.3	14.1	4.2
Others	15.5	18.4	11.7	12.4	9.7	17.4	9.4	29.2
<u>Marital status</u>								
Unmarried	44.4	46.9	41.3	44.0	51.6	41.3	69.8	25.0
Currently married	42.8	43.5	41.8	42.6	32.3	45.0	25.4	59.7
Others	12.8	9.6	16.9	13.4	16.1	13.8	4.8	15.3
<u>Place of residence</u>								
Thimphu	87.6	88.5	86.3	87.1	96.7	88.1	82.3	88.9
Outside Thimphu	12.4	11.5	13.7	12.9	3.3	11.9	17.7	11.1
Number	485	272	213	209	31	109	64	72

or trade, and this proportion is relatively lower (10%) among respondents in public places. Around one-fifth of males and females are government employees, and they are more likely to be found in Bars/Restaurants than in other venue types (25% compared with 12-19%). The students, which constitute about 10-12% of the respondents, are more likely to be visiting Discos and bars/restaurants.

The dominant occupational group in bars/restaurants is government employees (25%), in café/coffee bars/hotels is labourers (23%), in Karaoke are an almost equal proportion (16-17%) of labourers, business/trade and government employees, in Discos is government employees (19%), and in public places is labourers (21%).

Marital status

Overall, 44% of the sample is unmarried, 43% are currently married and 13% are either widowed, divorced or separated. Male patrons are more likely to be unmarried than female patrons (47% versus 41%), and female patrons are more likely than male patrons to be widowed, divorced or separated (10% and 17%, respectively).

The profile of respondents in terms of their marital status differs across venue types. For instance, a relatively greater proportion of respondents from Disco (70%) and Café/Coffee bars/hotels (51%) are unmarried. On the other hand, the majority of respondents from Public places (60%) are currently married.

Place of residence

A large majority (88%) of respondents is residents of Thimphu, and patrons at Discos are more likely than at other venues to be from outside Thimphu.

Sexual behaviours

Only **5%** of the respondents (3% of males and 9% of female) **did not have sexual intercourse prior to the interview**, and this proportion was relatively higher among respondents in Discos (11%) and Café/Coffee bar/hotels (10%) (Table 9).

Sexual behaviour indicators	Total	Sex		Venue type				
		Male	Female	Bar and restaurant	Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	Karaoke	Disco	Public places
<u>Ever had sexual intercourse</u>								
Yes	94.6	97.4	91.1	95.2	90.3	95.4	88.9	98.6
No	5.4	2.6	8.9	4.8	9.7	4.6	11.1	1.4
Number	484	271	213	209	31	109	63	72
<u>Age at first sex</u>								
<=15 years	16.9	22.1	9.8	17.2	17.9	14.6	19.6	17.1
16-19 years	43.5	46.2	39.9	42.9	42.9	43.7	44.6	44.3
20+ years	34.7	27.1	45.1	32.3	25.0	38.8	35.7	38.6
Dont know	4.8	4.6	5.2	7.6	14.3	2.9	0.0	0.0
Mean age at first sex	18.5	18.0	19.2	18.4	18.2	18.9	18.3	18.5
<u>Relationship with the 1st</u>								

<u>sexual partner</u>								
Spouse	23.4	9.8	41.8	27.6	28.6	23.1	14.3	16.9
Lover	41.0	39.0	43.8	38.7	50.0	42.3	42.9	40.8
Neighbour	17.0	25.8	5.2	14.1	17.9	15.4	19.6	25.4
Friend/classmate/colleague	11.1	14.4	6.7	13.1	3.6	12.5	7.1	9.9
Stranger/sex worker/client	4.4	6.4	1.5	4.0	0.0	3.8	7.1	5.6
Others	3.1	4.5	1.0	2.5	0.0	2.9	8.9	1.4
<u>Sex of the 1st sexual partner</u>								
Male	40.8	1.9	93.8	43.2	28.6	36.5	46.4	40.8
Female	59.2	98.1	6.2	56.8	71.4	63.5	53.6	59.2
Number who ever had sex	455	262	193	198	28	103	56	70

The mean age at first sex, overall, was 18.5 years, and a greater proportion of men than women reported first sex when they were under age 15 (22% compared with 10%). The mean age at first sex does not vary much across venue types, although a greater proportion of respondents in Discos had first sexual intercourse when they were under age 15 years (20%).

Background characteristic	Men			Women			Total		
	N	% had multiple partners in past 6 months	% had multiple partners in past 12 months	N	% had multiple partners in past 6 months	% had multiple partners in past 12 months	N	% had multiple partners in past 6 months	% had multiple partners in past 12 months
Total	271	44.6	66.1	212	24.1	33.5	483	35.6	51.8
<u>Age</u>									
<25 years	87	40.2	59.8	87	20.7	26.4	174	30.5	43.1
25+ years	184	46.7	69.0	125	26.4	38.4	309	38.5	56.6
<u>Literacy and education</u>									
Illiterate	40	47.5	70.0	48	22.9	39.6	88	34.1	53.4
Upto 9 years schooling	82	56.1	68.3	50	34.0	42.0	132	47.7	58.3
10+ years schooling	148	37.8	64.2	107	20.6	28.0	255	30.6	49.0
<u>Occupation</u>									
Labourer	51	58.8	82.4	28	21.4	25.0	79	45.6	62.0
Business/trade	33	66.7	78.8	32	40.6	43.8	65	53.8	61.5
Government employee	52	46.2	73.1	44	15.9	25.0	96	32.3	51.0
Clerical/salesman	24	54.2	62.5	21	0.0	14.3	45	28.9	40.0
Housewife	2	50.0	50.0	26	23.1	46.2	28	25.0	46.4
Student	32	31.3	56.3	21	42.9	57.1	53	35.8	56.6
Self employed	27	33.3	55.6	15	0.0	13.3	42	21.4	40.5
Others	50	24.0	48.0	25	40.0	40.0	75	29.3	45.3
<u>Marital status</u>									
Unmarried	127	46.5	65.4	88	19.3	26.1	215	35.3	49.3
Currently married	118	39.0	65.3	89	21.3	28.1	207	31.4	49.3
Others	26	61.5	73.1	35	42.9	65.7	61	50.8	68.9
<u>Place of residence</u>									

Thimphu	239	46.0	67.4	182	25.3	34.6	421	37.1	53.2
Outside Thimphu	31	32.3	54.8	29	17.2	24.1	60	25.0	40.0
<u>Place met sexual partner</u>									
Within Thimphu	229	49.3	72.1	162	29.6	41.4	391	41.2	59.3
Outside Thimphu, within Bhutan	113	56.6	82.3	51	41.2	51.0	164	51.8	72.6
Outside Bhutan	15	53.3	73.3	2	0.0	50.0	17	47.1	70.6
<u>Venue type</u>									
Bar and restaurant	112	37.5	62.5	97	25.8	36.1	209	32.1	50.2
Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	17	29.4	70.6	13	7.7	23.1	30	20.0	50.0
Karaoke	68	51.5	70.6	41	24.4	43.9	109	41.3	60.6
Disco	30	53.3	56.7	33	9.1	6.1	63	30.2	30.2
Public places	44	52.3	72.7	28	42.9	46.4	72	48.6	62.5

About 2% of the men and 6% of women reported that their first sexual partner was of the same sex.

The average number of sexual partners in the 6 and 12 months prior to survey was about 2 and 3, respectively. Overall, 36% of the **respondents had 2 or more sexual partners** in the past 6 months, and the men were almost twice as likely to have multiple partners in the reference period as women (45% compared with 24%) (Table 10). There was not much difference in the number of men and women reporting multiple sexual partners in the past 6 months, as per the self-administered questionnaire (48% and 22%, respectively). Almost half of the respondents in public places reported that they had sex with more than a partner in past 6 months, and this proportion was 43% in Karaoke, 34% each in Discos and bar/restaurants, and 22% in Café/Coffee bar/Hotel.

The proportion who had multiple sexual partners in the past 12 months increases to 55% overall – 68% among males and 37% among females. The pattern of differences in this proportion across different venue types is similar to the proportion that had multiple sexual partners in the past 6 months.

There is a good correspondence between what was reported by the key informants at venues (see the previous section on venue profile) and risk profile of the patrons as per the sample survey. For instance, as per the information provided by KIs, karaoke and disco bars as well as bars/restaurants are more likely to receive patrons seeking sexual partners. Consistent to this information, a greater proportion of respondents in these types of venues have reported multiple sexual partners.

A greater proportion of respondents who reside in Thimphu have reported multiple sexual partners in the past 12 months.

The survey also asked a question on the **places where the respondents usually meet their sexual partners**. A large majority (89%) reported that they met their sexual partners within Thimphu. Additionally, about 37% of the respondents met their sexual partners in the past 1 year outside Thimphu but within Bhutan – this proportion was relatively higher among males than females (44% versus 27%), and among respondents

in public places (47%). Interestingly, the respondents who had met their sexual partners outside Thimphu (either within Bhutan or outside) are more likely to have reported multiple sexual partners in the past 12 months (70-72%) compared to those who had met their sexual partners within Thimphu (59%).

There seems to be a substantial presence of commercial sexual network in the city, indicated by the proportion reporting **sex with sex workers and clients**. Of the 440 respondents who reported having sex in the past 12 months, 13% had sex with a sex worker or a client, and this proportion is 21% among males and 2% among females (Table 11). The percentage of respondents who reported commercial sexual partners is the highest at public places (17%), closely followed by bars and restaurants (15%). Respondents age 25-29 years (18%), those with up to 9 years of schooling (20%), students (17%) and those widowed, divorced or separated (17%) are more likely to have had sex with a sex worker or a client in the past 1 year.

Characteristic	Number	Spouse	Lover	Sex worker/client	Stranger	Known persons (friends, relatives, neighbours, colleagues and classmates)
Total	440	49.8	57.7	12.5	19.1	41.6
<u>Sex</u>						
Male	252	45.6	57.9	20.6	25.8	54.8
Female	188	55.3	57.4	1.6	10.1	23.9
<u>Venue type</u>						
Bar/restaurant	188	52.1	58.0	14.9	21.8	38.3
Café/ Coffee bar/ hotel	27	40.7	77.8	7.4	7.4	37.0
Karaoke	102	51.0	51.0	7.8	17.6	52.0
Disco	52	30.8	63.5	9.6	17.3	30.8
Public places	71	59.2	54.9	16.9	19.7	45.1

Applying these proportions to the number of men and women visiting the mapped venues during the peak day, an estimated 2000 men and 150 had engaged in commercial sex in the past 12 months.

A substantial proportion of respondents (19%) have also reported **sex with strangers** – indicating casual sexual network involving unknown partners as well. Men are about two and half times more likely than females to have had sex with strangers (25% compared with 10%). A greater proportion of persons visiting Bar/restaurant (22%) reported sex with a stranger in the past 12 months. Persons age 25-29 years (21%), students (23%), and widowed, divorced or separated (23%) are more likely than others to have had casual sex with strangers in the past 12 months.

A large proportion of respondents (42%) have also reported **sex with known non-regular partners** (relatives, neighbors, friends, colleagues and classmates) – indicating casual sexual network involving known partners as well. Men are over two times more likely than females to have had sex with known non-regular partners (55% compared with 24%). A greater proportion of persons visiting Karaoke (52%) reported sex with a known non-regular partner in the past 12 months. Students (53%) and unmarried

individuals (53%) are more likely than others to have had casual sex with known non-regular partners in the past 12 months.

A large proportion of respondents (58%) have also reported **sex with their lovers** – indicating casual sexual network as well. Persons visiting Café/Coffee bar/hotels and Discos are more likely to have had sex with their lovers in the past 12 months (78% and 64%, respectively). Persons age 19-24 years (75%), labourers, students (68% each), the self-employed (73%), and unmarried respondents (86%) are more likely than others to have had casual sex with lovers in the past 12 months.

It is also interesting to note that half of the respondents also reported **sex with spouse**, indicating a possible overlap of different types (commercial, casual and regular) of sexual partners.

Of the 125 respondents who reported sex with a sex worker or a client or a stranger in the past 12 months, little over half met these partners in bars/restaurants. The other frequently reported places to meet new sexual partners are – public places (44%), home (42%), phone/internet (38%), and discos (28%).

Paying/paid partners

Overall, 35% of the males and 11% of the females reported that they have ever paid or received payment for sex (Table 12), payment including cash and/or gifts. Men are more likely to have paid than received payment for sex (32% and 5%, respectively). On the other hand, women are more likely to receive than make payment for sex (9% versus 1%). Men visiting public places (41%) and discos (45%) are more likely than others to have paid or received payment for sex. In comparison, women visiting bars/restaurants are more likely to have received payment or have paid for sex (14%).

Characteristic	Male				Female			
	N	Ever paid for sex	Received payment for sex	Received or paid cash/gift for sex	N	Ever paid for sex	Received payment for sex	Received or paid cash/gift for sex
Total	263	31.9	4.9	35.0	192	1.0	9.4	11.2
<u>Age</u>								
<25 years	84	20.2	8.3	23.8	72	0.0	12.5	12.5
25+ years	179	37.4	3.3	40.2	120	1.7	7.5	10.3
<u>Literacy and education</u>								
Illiterate	38	15.8	2.6	20.5	46	0.0	17.4	18.6
Upto 9 years schooling	81	37.0	6.2	41.3	46	0.0	15.2	17.8
10+ years schooling	143	33.6	4.9	35.7	94	2.1	3.2	5.3
<u>Occupation</u>								
Labourer	49	30.6	10.0	36.7	24	0.0	8.3	8.3
Business/trade	33	39.4	0.0	39.4	30	3.3	6.7	10.7

Government employee	52	38.5	9.6	40.4	42	0.0	2.4	4.8
Clerical/salesman	23	30.4	4.3	34.8	17	0.0	0.0	0.0
Housewife	2	0.0	0.0	0.0	26	0.0	11.5	11.5
Student	30	30.0	0.0	30.0	19	0.0	26.3	27.8
Self employed	26	11.5	0.0	15.4	12	0.0	8.3	8.3
Others	48	35.4	4.2	39.6	22	4.5	18.2	22.7
<u>Marital status</u>								
Unmarried	120	25.0	5.8	29.4	69	0.0	10.1	11.8
Currently married	117	35.0	4.2	36.4	88	2.3	5.7	8.0
Others	26	50.0	3.8	53.8	35	0.0	17.1	18.2
<u>Place of residence</u>								
Thimphu	231	31.6	5.6	35.1	168	1.2	7.7	9.8
Outside Thimphu	31	32.3	0.0	32.3	23	0.0	21.7	21.7
<u>Venue type</u>								
Bar and restaurant	109	33.0	4.6	38.0	89	0.0	13.5	13.8
Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	16	12.5	5.9	11.8	10	0.0	0.0	0.0
Karaoke	65	23.1	7.7	27.7	39	2.6	5.1	10.8
Disco	29	44.8	3.4	44.8	27	0.0	7.4	7.4
Public places	44	40.9	2.3	40.9	27	3.7	7.4	11.1

Number of sex workers in the past 6 months: Men

Of the 49 men who reported having had sex with a sex worker in the past 6 months, 57% had sex with 2 or more FSWs.

Places where the FSWs are met: Men

Most men picked up FSWs from Bars/restaurants and from Karaoke and disco bars.

Ever had sex with someone of the same sex in the past year: Men and women

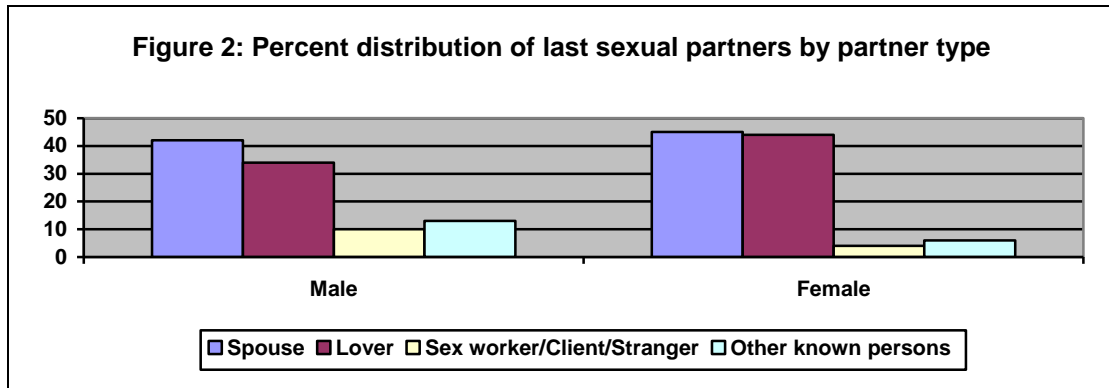
Only about 3% of the males and non of the female respondents reported that they had sex with the person of the same sex in the past year. Men in business/trade were more likely (5%) than others to have had sex with someone of the same sex.

Whether know any men who have anal sex with men: Men and women

When asked if they know any men who have anal sex with men, 5% of the men and 4% of the women in the survey responded affirmatively.

The most recent sexual partner

A substantial proportion of the most recent sexual partners of men tend to be sex workers, clients or strangers (10%) compared to the partners of women (4%) (Figure 2). On the other hand, a relatively greater proportion of women reported their last sexual partners as lovers compared to men (44% versus 34%).



It appears that a substantial proportion of sexual partners are met in venues that were mapped in the study, including the public places. One-third of the lovers were met in venues such as bar/restaurant, Karaoke and Discos about 6% in public places. Two-thirds of the sex workers, clients and strangers were also met in these venues and another 17% in public places.

Condom Access and Use Indicators

Condom access and use indicators are presented in Table 13.

Ever purchased a condom

Little less than two-fifths of the respondents (51% men and 18% women) reported having ever bought a condom. Respondents age 25+ years, persons with 10+ years of schooling, unmarried persons, and residents of Thimphu are more likely than others to have bought condoms. The proportion who have ever purchased a condom is substantially higher for those have ever paid/received cash/gift in return for sex than those who haven't (57% versus 30%).

90% of those who have ever bought condoms had purchased them from Pharmacies.

Ever received free condoms

The majority of the respondents (72%) reported that they have received free condoms in the past, and this proportion is relatively greater for men than women (84% versus 56%). There are no substantial differences in this respect across venue types and other background characteristics of the respondents, except that those who have ever paid/received cash/gift for sex are more likely to have received free condoms than others (88% compared with 67%).

Of those who have ever received free condoms, 72% cited hospital/clinic, 14% cited program staff/ condom men/ peer educators, and 12% cited Dechong box as the source from where they received free condoms the last time.

Easy accessibility of condoms

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents also think that they can get condoms easily. However, a relatively smaller proportion of respondents under age 25 years (68%), the illiterate (68%), and visitors to Discos (44%) are of the opinion that condoms can easily be obtained.

Table 13: Condom ever use and access indicators					
	N	Ever used condom	Ever bought condom	Ever received free condom	Think condom can be easily get
Total	449	77.3	37.2	71.9	73.5
<u>Sex</u>					
Male	261	82.0	51.0	83.5	73.4
Female	188	70.7	18.1	55.7	73.7
<u>Age</u>					
<25 years	154	80.5	29.9	72.5	65.3
25+ years	295	75.6	41.0	71.6	77.6
<u>Literacy and education</u>					
Illiterate	84	63.1	21.4	61.4	68.3
Upto 9 years schooling	126	77.8	33.3	72.8	73.0
10+ years schooling	232	82.3	45.7	76.5	75.7
<u>Occupation</u>					
Labourer	74	79.7	45.9	75.7	72.2
Business/trade	61	77.0	29.5	70.0	80.3
Government employee	93	82.8	40.9	75.0	73.1
Clerical/salesman	39	71.8	35.9	56.4	56.4
Housewife	27	55.6	14.8	48.1	70.4
Student	48	77.1	39.6	72.9	77.1
Self employed	37	89.2	35.1	72.2	72.2
Others	70	72.9	38.6	82.6	78.3
<u>Marital status</u>					
Unmarried	186	84.9	45.7	79.0	71.7
Currently married	202	69.3	34.2	66.8	71.6
Others	61	80.3	21.3	66.7	85.0
<u>Place of residence</u>					
Thimphu	394	78.9	38.3	73.4	73.4
Outside Thimphu	53	66.0	28.3	59.6	73.1
<u>Venue type</u>					
Bar and restaurant	196	78.1	36.2	71.0	77.8
Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	27	70.4	44.4	63.0	66.7
Karaoke	102	73.5	38.2	71.6	75.2
Disco	56	85.7	33.9	72.7	43.6
Public places	68	76.5	38.2	77.9	85.3
<u>Paid/paying partner</u>					
Ever received/paid for sex	112	85.7	57.1	88.3	78.4
Never received/ paid for sex	332	74.7	30.4	66.9	71.4
<u># of partners in past 12 months</u>					
None	16	68.8	12.5	87.5	43.8

1	183	66.7	26.8	57.5	65.0
2	99	84.8	37.4	78.8	82.8
3	48	91.7	39.6	83.3	85.4
4+	100	84.0	60.0	82.0	78.8

Ever used a condom

Overall, 77% of the respondents (82% of males and 71% of females) reported having ever used a condom. The proportion who ever used a condom increased with increasing education – from 63% among the illiterate to 92% among those with 10+ years of schooling. Across the different occupational groups, housewives were less likely to have ever used condoms, the proportion being 56%. A lower proportion of currently married respondents also reported having ever used a condom – indicating relatively less condom use between spouses. Respondents from outside Thimphu are less likely to have ever used a condom (66%).

Condom use seems to be relatively greater in commercial sex – as indicated by a greater proportion of those who ever paid/received cash/gift for sex reporting ever use of condom than the others (86% compared with 75%).

Condom use with the most recent sexual partner

Overall, 47% of the male and 53% of the female respondents reported that they had **used condom in last sex** with their most recent sexual partner (Table 14). Among men, condom use in last sex was the highest (86%) when the most recent partner was a sex worker or a stranger, and was the least (24%) when the most recent sexual partner was spouse. The pattern was similar in case of female respondents – highest when the most recent partner was a client or a stranger and least when husband was the most recent partner. A greater proportion of women than men reported condom use with lovers (78% versus 55%).

Men and women visiting bars/restaurants and public places are less likely to have used a condom in last sex with their most recent sexual partners.

Only 33% of men and 53% of women reported “every time” condom use with their most recent sexual partner, and the pattern of this response is similar to the reporting of condom use in last sex.

	Male			Female		
	Number	condom used in last sex	Every time condom used	Number	condom used in last sex	Every time condom used
Total	260	46.9	33.1	189	53.4	40.0
<u>Age</u>						
<25 years	83	57.8	45.2	72	66.7	51.4
25+ years	177	41.8	27.4	117	45.3	33.1
<u>Education level</u>						

Illiterate	38	31.6	23.1	46	50.0	41.3
Upto 9 years schooling	80	37.5	26.3	44	50.0	44.4
10+ years schooling	141	56.7	39.9	93	59.1	39.8
<u>Occupation</u>						
Labourer	50	44.0	36.0	24	54.2	45.8
Business/trade	31	29.0	21.9	30	63.3	43.3
Government employee	52	53.8	42.3	41	63.4	39.0
Clerical/salesman	22	59.1	43.5	17	23.5	5.9
Housewife	2	0.0	0.0	25	28.0	26.9
Student	29	55.2	33.3	18	66.7	55.6
Self employed	26	53.8	34.6	12	58.3	50.0
Others	48	41.7	22.9	22	59.1	54.5
<u>Marital status</u>						
Unmarried	117	66.7	54.6	69	78.3	58.0
Currently married	117	28.2	11.9	87	28.7	20.7
Others	26	42.3	30.8	33	66.7	52.9
<u>Place of residence</u>						
Thimphu	229	47.6	32.9	165	56.4	42.2
Outside Thimphu	30	40.0	35.5	23	34.8	26.1
<u>Venue type</u>						
Bar and restaurant	107	48.6	31.5	87	58.6	43.2
Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	17	29.4	17.6	10	20.0	20.0
Karaoke	64	51.6	35.4	38	50.0	28.9
Disco	28	57.1	44.8	27	55.6	48.1
Public places	44	36.4	31.8	27	51.9	44.4
<u>Received or paid cash/gift for sex</u>						
Ever received or paid for sex	91	53.8	41.8	21	71.4	66.7
Neither received nor paid for sex	168	42.9	28.1	164	51.8	37.6
<u>Number of sexual partners had in the last 12 months</u>						
None	8	75.0	40.0	6	50.0	16.7
1	74	45.9	24.3	112	44.6	33.9
2	62	38.7	25.8	36	63.9	45.9
3	33	33.3	23.5	15	73.3	60.0
4+	82	56.1	48.8	18	72.2	61.1
<u>Relationship with most recent partner</u>						
Spouse	110	24.5	6.3	85	24.7	16.3
Lover	87	55.2	41.6	82	78.0	58.5
Sex worker/client/stranger	28	85.7	89.3	8	87.5	75.0
Others	35	65.7	51.4	12	75.0	66.7
<u>Duration of relationship with most recent partner</u>						
<1 month	54	70.4	56.4	26	61.5	46.2
> 1 month but less than 1 year	75	54.7	43.4	56	73.2	62.5
>1 year but less than 2 years	18	55.6	27.8	13	69.2	46.2
2+ years	87	32.2	20.5	66	42.4	27.3
<u>Interval between most recent and second last partnerships</u>						
Only 1 partner	44	50.0	28.9	88	46.6	34.1
< 1 month	52	48.1	41.5	33	69.7	60.6

1 month	26	53.8	48.1	5	60.0	33.3
2-5 month	53	54.7	37.7	15	66.7	46.7
6-11 months	49	36.7	22.4	15	60.0	33.3
1+ year	36	38.9	22.2	28	53.6	42.9

Injection practices

Only 30% of the respondents (40% men and 19% women) reported having ever taken drugs by swallowing, sniffing or smoking for fun or to get high (Table 15). Visitors to Café/ coffee bars and discos are more likely than others to have ever taken drugs. 40% or more of the respondents under age 25 years (40%), unmarried respondents (40%), those who have ever paid/received cash/gift for sex (53%) reported ever use of drugs.

However, a small proportion of about 2% have reported having ever injected drugs (4% males and less than 1% females). Most of those who have ever injected drugs had done so in groups, about 30% reported sharing of needles.

Background characteristic	N	Ever taken drugs	Ever injected drugs for high or fun
Total	453	30.0	2.4
<u>Sex</u>			
Male	263	39.5	3.8
Female	190	16.8	0.5
<u>Age</u>			
<25 years	155	40.6	1.3
25+ years	298	24.5	3.0
<u>Education level</u>			
Illiterate	84	13.1	0.0
Upto 9 years schooling	126	26.2	1.6
10+ years schooling	236	39.0	3.8
<u>Occupation</u>			
Labourer	73	26.0	2.7
Business/trade	62	22.6	3.2
Government employee	93	25.8	4.3
Clerical/salesman	39	35.9	2.6
Housewife	28	10.7	0.0
Student	49	46.9	0.0
Self employed	38	44.7	2.6
Others	71	31.0	1.4
<u>Marital status</u>			
Unmarried	188	41.0	3.2
Currently married	204	20.1	1.5
Others	61	29.5	3.3
<u>Place of residence</u>			
Thimphu	398	29.4	2.5
Outside Thimphu	53	34.0	0.0
<u>Venue type</u>			
Bar and restaurant	195	27.2	3.1
Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	27	51.9	0.0

Karaoke	104	23.1	0.0
Disco	56	46.4	8.9
Public places	71	26.8	0.0
<u>Received or paid cash/gift for sex</u>			
Ever received or paid for sex	111	53.2	7.1
Neither received nor paid for sex	336	22.9	0.9
<u>Number of sexual partners had in the last 12 months</u>			
None	16	56.3	0.0
1	185	23.8	2.7
2	100	34.0	0.0
3	49	32.7	4.0
4+	99	33.3	4.0

HIV/AIDS: Knowledge, perception and testing

A large majority of males (98%) and females (95%) reported that they **have heard of HIV/AIDS**.

26% of males and 23% females also **feel that they are at risk of being infected with HIV**. There are no substantial differences in this risk perception, except that a greater proportion of men who have ever paid/received cash/gift for sex perceive themselves at risk than others (33% versus 22%).

Little over half of men (53%) and women (51%) **have ever taken an HIV test**, and this proportion too is substantially higher for men who reported having ever paid cash/gift for sex (65%).

Experience of STIs in past 12 months

Overall, 20% of the male and 29% of the female respondents reported having experienced, in the past 12 months, any of the specific symptoms of STIs such as ulcers or sores in genital area, vaginal/genital discharge, lower abdominal pain/ burning pain while urinating (Table 16). Men visiting Karaoke, women visiting public places and those who have ever paid/received cash/gift for sex were more likely to have experienced an STI than the others.

Background characteristic	Male			Female		
	N	Experienced any STI	Sought treatment for the STI	N	Experienced any STI	Sought treatment for the STI
Total	259	19.7	69.2	184	28.8	64.7
<u>Age</u>						
<25 years	81	18.5	81.8	70	30.0	64.7
25+ years	178	20.2	64.3	114	28.1	64.7
<u>Education level</u>						
Illiterate	38	31.6	75.0	43	11.6	50.0

Upto 9 years schooling	80	16.3	66.7	45	35.6	81.3
10+ years schooling	140	18.6	68.4	90	33.3	59.3
<u>Occupation</u>						
Labourer	49	12.2	66.7	24	12.5	33.3
Business/trade	32	28.1	66.7	29	27.6	87.5
Government employee	51	13.7	60.0	41	26.8	85.7
Clerical/salesman	23	13.0	66.7	16	43.8	62.5
Housewife	2	50.0	0.0	25	28.0	75.0
Student	28	32.1	83.3	18	55.6	44.4
Self employed	26	19.2	75.0	9	11.1	100.0
Others	48	22.9	72.7	22	27.3	42.9
<u>Marital status</u>						
Unmarried	116	18.1	80.0	68	35.3	59.1
Currently married	117	17.9	58.8	83	26.5	68.2
Others	26	34.6	71.4	33	21.2	71.4
<u>Place of residence</u>						
Thimphu	227	19.8	65.7	161	28.0	60.5
Outside Thimphu	31	16.1	100.0	22	36.4	87.5
<u>Venue type</u>						
Bar and restaurant	107	13.1	100.0	85	25.9	63.2
Cafe/Coffee bars/hotel	16	12.5	100.0	10	30.0	40.0
Karaoke	64	34.4	45.0	38	26.3	70.0
Disco	29	20.7	66.7	26	26.9	42.9
Public places	43	16.3	100.0	25	44.0	90.0
<u>Received or paid cash/gift for sex</u>						
Ever received or paid for sex	90	25.6	80.0	21	38.1	85.7
Neither received nor paid for sex	168	16.7	57.9	161	28.0	61.4
<u>Number of sexual partners had in the last 12 months</u>						
None	10	10.0	100.0	6	16.7	100.0
1	72	15.3	71.4	107	29.0	58.6
2	62	27.4	60.0	37	35.1	64.3
3	34	17.6	40.0	15	13.3	100.0
4+	80	20.0	90.9	17	35.3	80.0
<u>Relationship with most recent partner</u>						
Spouse	110	21.8	57.9	82	23.2	70.0
Lover	87	19.5	90.9	82	31.7	54.2
Sex worker/client/stranger	27	11.1	66.7	8	37.5	50.0
Others	35	20.0	66.7	12	41.7	100.0
<u>Duration of relationship with most recent partner</u>						
<1 month	54	20.4	55.6	25	40.0	25.0
> 1 month but less than 1 year	76	18.4	83.3	56	35.7	73.7
>1 year but less than 2 years	18	11.1	0.0	13	23.1	100.0
2+ years	85	22.4	76.9	64	23.4	60.0
<u>Interval between most recent and second last partnerships</u>						
Only 1 partner	43	18.6	40.0	83	24.1	50.0
< 1 month	52	26.9	90.0	32	43.8	76.9

1 month	26	3.8	100.0	7	42.9	66.7
2-5 month	53	37.7	66.7	15	13.3	0.0
6-11 months	49	2.0	100.0	15	60.0	88.9
1+ year	36	19.4	50.0	28	14.3	66.7

Overall, 69% of males and 65% of females who have experienced an STI symptom in the past 12 months have sought treatment.

Implications

The findings from the quantitative behavioural survey among the patrons of select venues have highlighted some of the following patterns of sexual behaviour, which may be considered while designing an HIV prevention program in Thimphu. It is important to note that the results are not generalizable to the population in Bhutan or Thimphu city, but reflect only on people who frequent certain venues or locales. For programming, the results indicate why these venues/locales could be the focus.

- The sexual behaviours in terms of the number and mix of sexual partners, as reported by the respondents in the survey, suggest the presence of a local sexual network that has a potential of transmitting STIs including HIV within the network.
 - A substantial proportion of men (45%) and women (24%) interviewed have reported more than one sexual partner in the past 12 months
 - An analyses of both the types of sexual partnerships in the past 12 months and the respondent's relationship to the most recent sexual partner indicate that although the spouses and lovers (regular, long-term partnerships) dominate the sexual network of the respondents, a substantial part of the network also includes casual sexual partnerships (with strangers and known persons other than lovers and spouses), and more importantly, commercial partnerships (female sex workers or clients).
 - The venues such as bars/restaurants, karaoke and disco bars, and public places are often cited as places where individuals are introduced to these non-regular sexual networks, and provide a potential locations for HIV prevention services including condoms and peer outreach.
- Consistent condom use even in casual sexual partnerships needs to be promoted.
- The self-reported experience of STIs is quite substantial, and referral services for to STI-related counseling and treatment at the venues may be an important part of the HIV prevention programs at these venues.

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SEXUAL NETWORK FORMATION

Methods

Two women and three men were recruited to undergo training in the basics of qualitative data collection, which included ethnographic fieldnote writing and open-ended qualitative interviewing techniques. The five community researchers (CRs) were selected because of the social ties that they held with high risk drug and alcohol using networks. This background enabled them interpret social interactions at venues where alcohol and drugs were consumed. Moreover, these social ties allowed the CRs to readily gain rapport with potential research participants. Therefore, the lengthy time period required for conventional ethnographic work on a sensitive subject was bypassed.

Ethnography.

The CRs were trained in the anthropological technique known as “participant observation” (Spradley 1978) to identify and document the social and cultural factors that shape sexual risk taking. Specifically, the CRs were trained to note the following: gender power relations, alcohol and drug consumption, and patterns in sexual network formation. Ethnographic observations at “hotspot” were dated and recorded in personal fieldnote journals four times per week. This ethnographic work served two purposes: first, it allowed CRs to identify and recruit key informants that were willing to participate in in-depth qualitative interviews; and second, it generated the contextual background to interpret the qualitative interviews.

Qualitative interviews.

During the training workshops, the CRs took turns practicing on each other with the interview guide. This practicing resulted in the re-wording and re-ordering of the question set with the aim of enhancing the elicitation of detailed responses from participants. Each CR conducted an additional practice interview with a friend. This step served as a pilot test for the interview guide and it also gave the CRs the opportunity to further hone their interviewing skills. The goal of the qualitative interviews was to examine, in detail, issues around sexual network formation, multiple sexual partners and their overlap (concurrency), condom use/non-use, and knowledge and attitudes around STI/HIV/AIDS.

Sampling

After engaging in practice ethnographic sessions, the CRs conducted three weeks of participant observation by attending bars, karaoke and other entertainment clubs and discotheques during peak times of social activity. The venues frequented followed a sampling approach that was both convenient and snowballing: CRs accompanied an initial key informant to one venue and then “hopped” from venue to venue, joining the informant as s/he move about Thimphu. Through this process, the CRs were introduced to other key informants. After one week of ethnography, CRs organized interviews with key informants. These interviews were completed by the end of week three. Key informants were purposively sampled to capture the perceptions of individuals considered to be members of vulnerable groups (i.e., women involved in transactional sex, sex workers, clients of sex workers, men and women with multiple and overlapping

sexual partners.) Effort was also made to gather perceptions that were balanced in terms of gender. Although CRs attempted to include MSM, this was not feasible given the extremely hidden nature of this community and the short timeframe (3 weeks) in which CRS were permitted to gather data. It would be advised that future studies attempting to access this community would directly involve CRs recruited from MSM social networks to gain the initial entry point.

Ethnographic fieldnotes

Venue coverage

During the three-week period of conducting ethnography, the CRs generated “thick descriptions” (Geertz) that characterized the flow and vibrancy of the patrons at 22 venues. Below is an abbreviated overview.

Figure A: Venue and Main Social Actor Descriptions

<i>Name</i>	<i>Venue type</i>	<i>Main social actors</i>
Venue 1	Entertainment club	There we saw 60 customers around the club inside. [The customers] were all clapping for the entertainers performing in the club. The female entertainers looked like commercial sex workers because they were using their beauty and bodies to attract the customers to the club and making the customers throw more money on particular songs requested. 19/12/09 10:00pm
Venue 2	discotheque	Since ten o'clock was early for the party to start, there were not many people attending the party. And I could count a total of 16 people, youngsters in their teens both girls and boys: the numbers of boys exceeding the girls. After forty five minutes or so, many entered the venue, some in same gender, some in pairs and some in mixed gender group. And now, the party floor was full and packed.. and there was a push and pull in every corner of the floor. Date of observation
Venue 3	Entertainment club	The draying was having 5 female dancers and entertainers. Three of the females, beautifully dressed up in Kiras, were entertaining the customers and asking them to request songs and dances. The room at first seemed empty and very few numbers of people were there. I could easily count the heads of the customers, they were 20 of them. The time I visited this draying was around 7:30pm. They seemed to be the age of 20 to 29 and the male seemed to be at late 30's. 5/12/09
Venue 4	Entertainment club	I was shocked to see the hut-like drayang holding more than 70 people inside it and most of them seemed to be drunkards. There, most of the customers, and some females also there, were of late 20's. It had 7 female entertainers. The spot looked too hot because some female entertainers were sitting within the male groups and hugging [the

		customers]. It was around 10:55pm. 5/12/09
Venue 5	Discotheque	In this club at around 11:05pm, it was hard for me to get inside it because it was really hot and compact. There were almost more than 200 customers coming for the party. The ratio between the male and female didn't seem to vary this time because they were mostly in couples. 5/12/09
Venue 6	Entertainment club	There were four male dancers and seven female dancers. Some of them were dancing on the stage and some at the customer table. The customers were almost 11-12 and most of them seemed to be male. There were few females around. I was sitting at the corner doing my task. 14/12/09 10:47pm
Venue 7	disco	It was around 8:45 pm when I walked all the way to lower chubachu. When I reached there I saw a lots of groups on its way. The club was jammed with more than 65 customers. Most of them seemed to be the business and government service people and some through dress ups looks that they belong to a strong [high social and economic status] background family. 9:00pm 11/12/09 11/12/09
Venue 8	Entertainment club	At 9:30 pm me and my ethnographer friends went to the this draying. As we entered the draying there the music was really classic [traditional Bhutanese]. It made me feel that I was in cultural show. The customers were not much at particular time, I could easily get the number of people in the draying: there were around 20-39 of them. The female dancer/entertainers of the draqyang seemed to be very busy. Some were dancing to the request of the people and some of them were approaching the [customers]. 7/12/09 9:37
Venue 9	Discotheque	Around the counter were few groups of people and among them were eight ladies of late 20s and two gents of late 50s. They seemed to be government employees and almost all of them were drunk. A lady who was wearing a red high neck and a pair of jeans. She was shaking her body sexily and she was hot too. The two guys seemed to be attracted towards her and they went dancing to her. Since the time was 11:55 PM the people around the club increased and almost 40 people were there in the club. I saw a man who was of his late 70s was dancing with two ladies of late 30's. 16/12/09
Venue 10	Snooker bar	The snooker room was full of cigarette smoke and with mixture of young people, age about 20-35 years old. I could see so many people at the bar, I felt quite uncomfortable to enter the bar because all the people there were all high standard peoples [from a higher social economic status]. There was a mixture of groups around the counter drinking

		alcohol and chatting. In one corner I saw a mixture of elderly people in a group drinking and smoking cigarette. Some were dancing in pairs. 27/11/2009 10:00 PM – 12:30 AM
Venue 11	Entertainment club	A group of girls dancing on the stage. There was one female in the counter and few girls walking around with a note pad and a pen. I have noticed that they don't have any female customers in that place. The few girls that are there were working for the draying. There were few male customers in the draying as it was Monday. 30/11/09 10PM
Venue 12	Disco	As I walked in I saw a few people dancing on the dance floor and a group of people at the bar counter. The people at the bar counter were all the older ones drinking alcohol. There are both male and female in group and some of them are already drunk and dancing. I took a seat and have a look at the group dancing. In one corner there was a group of elderly ladies dancing with their male friends. By looking at them they seemed to be from the wealthier background. Men are buying drinks for the ladies and trying to hook up with them. 16/12/09 10:00 pm - 12:00 am
Venue 13	Hotel or karaoke	There were eight girl dancers in a formal uniform and a bar girl who time to time cleaned the mess of empty bottles and glasses from the tables. The inflow of people and out flow was continuous... Most who came to the venue were men and most probably to look for girls; some came as couples and some two to four men with two to three girls and some three to four girls with a girl with a single man. Most of the people who came to the venue were in the age range of twenty to forty. The clothes that the people in the venue wore were neither expensive nor that cheap. 12/12/09 8:30 pm
Venue 14	Bar	I looked around. I saw only few people, not as usual and only few female. Their age was in between 25 to 40 years old. I saw the lady whom I have seen outside the toilet with a group of men. And with her there was another lady. Her male friends were quite older than her she was in late twenties and her male friends were in late thirties. The men looked like a wealthy one. 12/12/09 9:30pm to 12:00am
Venue 15	Entertainment club	I saw the club was occupied by more than 20 people enjoying the music. The club was decorated in a pure Bhutanese style, decorated in different colors of bulbs, it looked very lazy. I noticed people enjoying the show and every one was having lost of fun. There were 8 female bar dancers making each performance lively and enthusiastic, they was also a bar tender(female) who was very busy serving the drinks. All the female staffs were age between

		16 to 26. They were wearing uniform kiras except one was wearing pant and shirt. After a while there were more people coming in the club, both male and females of middle age. 27/11/2009 10:00 PM
Venue 16	Discotheque	The moment I entered the room I can see more than 80 people shaking their bodies on the floor in the dazzling light bladed of all colors. Generally the usual party starts from 9:30 to 10 pm in the night and gradually the flow of people starts exactly at 11 pm. Friends, they get together for the recreation, drinking and sharing their views. The party usually ends at 12 am (mid night) on Wednesdays and 2 am on Fridays and Saturdays. But this is a sport or discotheque that sometimes royal family attends and sometimes it runs till 3 am or 4am in the morning.02/12/ 2009 10:30
Venue 17	Disco	That place was packed with lots of youngsters and also with some few elderly people... There were 80-90 people when I entered first time, not nit very long people gathered, some in groups, some in pairs and some alone, among all the people entering the discotheque. I found more numbers in female and they all looked very young. 5/12/09 10pm
Venue 18	Disco	is very happening club, because this club gathers most of the youths, school goers and school drop outs. The party hall looks after, by the total of 6 executives, meaning the discotheques is taken care by four bouncers and two bar tenders and other 1 helper in general. People gather and crowd from 11pm on wards. The group of few girls were all dressed very well and looks like they are from rich family. Some girls they come in groups and some in couples. 16/12/09 10 PM
Venue 19	Entertainment club	This is a club that not many people come and enjoy and at the same time the clubs seems not very attractive. There was a girl dancer and boy and of course the boy is M.C (mike course) too. The club is not very famous and at attractive too, where as other clubs are packed and well occupied by customers. In this club few people come. As same as other clubs this club also exactly starts from seven o'clock except Fridays and Saturdays, they provide good timing till 12 am. The crowd gathers from 9:30-10:00pm in the evening. 14/12/09 9pm
Venue 20	Pub	The pub is opened every evening at 3:00pm and opened till late night, especially on the weekends. It is a cozy place where usually all the working people come and drink, catch up to their old and new friends. The older man aged 26 yrs to 36 years come and share their business matters, trips and relax their tensions, stress and to enjoy their friend's company. They even talked about their good and old days,

		cracking jokes, pulling each other's legs and even sharing their crisis too. All the people who come to the pub are all dignified and are matured, who loves to listen to music of their choice. They can even sing and see their own performance in the screen. 11/12/09 11 PM
Venue 21	Entertainment club	There were five female dancers who were all spinsters in the age group of 20 to 26 years, dressed in brightly colored kira and tago with heavy make-up and with long earrings, making them look more attractive and beautiful. Three male musicians who played the guitar, drum set, pinion very well. These guys seemed to be in the age group of 20 to 26 years. Slowly the crowd started flowing in groups, pairs and some walked in singles. Most of them were guys aged 18 to 36 years, they knew the dancers and were even given company by these girls, they sat and shared drinks holding hands, hugging and whispering into each other's ears, giggling, laughing and nodding their heads. 14/12/2010
Venue 22	Entertainment club	There were five female dancers aged 20 to 26 years who were all single. The three musicians were male age 20 to 26 years. The crowd which was mostly youngsters who were in the age group of 18 years to 29 years who came to the drayang to drink, tease the drayang dancers who were equally flirting with them. The guys were pinching their bums and pulling them forcing them to sit with them. The girls were even asking the guys to buy them drinks and making them request songs which the guys did happily making the girls promise them that they would come with them when the drayang closed. 14/12/09 9PM

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis of the fieldnote journals revealed rich detail in four key areas that relate to sexual risk taking behaviour, sexual network formation and HIV vulnerability: 1) Gender power relationships; 2) relationship between female entertainers and customers; 3) Age/class power relationships and 4) Drug and alcohol consumption.

Gender power

Consistently, CRs described scenarios in which women, particularly those working as entertainers, were being handled in a forceful manner by men. However, in many instances younger women did not refuse and even seemed to enjoy men's physical advances, as the following 2 fieldnote excerpts suggest:

These guys were all drinking alcohol and were enjoying themselves teasing the drayang girls and slapping the drayang girls bum, pulling them to sit on the laps, The girls did not show any sign of embarrassment at all. In fact

they give them a big smile and cat walked, telling them that they will join them later.

The crowd which was mostly youngsters who were in the age group of 18 years to 29 years who came to the drayang to drink, tease the drayang dancers who were equally flirting with them. The guys were pinching their bums and pulling them forcing them to sit with them. The girls were even asking the guys to buy them drinks and making them request songs which the guys did happily making the girls promise them that they would come with them when the drayang closed. The drayang girls seemed to know almost all the male customers and were sitting next to them hugging and even smooching. [Drayang]

There I saw a man in his early thirties forcefully dragging a bar girl and she was screaming but by the looking at her expression I found that she was not that unhappy. I asked the man whom I was talking to and the man told me that it is very usual and you don't have to be surprised. He said if you throw "meat" in front of the "cat", definitely the "cat" will "eat the meat". He also told me that the girls here don't have any character including the lady manager. {karaoke and bar}

Statements about the "low moral character" of female sex or entertainment workers formed a pervasive theme in the fieldnotes: male customer generally held little respect for "bar girls". This persistent lack of respect was often reflected in the way that men physically handled/coerced young women. In the next account, young women who attempt to refuse male advances often are unable to resist. Furthermore, many of these women relied on men at the end of the evening for a drive home.

When the last number was announce by the DJ the men pulled the young ladies to do the slow dance holding them tightly even when the ladies were trying to push them apart; but it was in vain. The men were literally pulling the girls and asking them their mobile numbers. When the party got over the ladies who did not have a car asked the men for lift's which the men eagerly agreed to drop them home. [club]

Female entertainers who encountered unwanted physical advances from men often had little recourse and protection from bar staff.

From outside we could see through the glass the dancer girls in full vigorous swing to appear sexy and attractive to the audience. In front of the counter a tall women dancer and a man of her height were standing, and the man was rubbing the women's abdomen as if he was a gynecologist....One man was dragging another dancer girl and forcefully over to his friend. I found the girl was quite shy and not happy and she was running away from him but the man was chasing her all around the floor, I expected that the bar owner would say something but to my astonishment I found the bar lady was laughing her teeth and mouth as red as a vampire with beetle nut chewing [Karaoke and Bar]

Some males were slapping on their bum and pulling [the dancers] to sit down on their lap and even to the extent of kissing them, The girls even served drinks and flirted around with the guys. Some dancers knew some male customers well and were asking money and promising to see them after the [draying] closes down. Some guys were passing nasty comments, which the girls took casually by giving them cheesy smile and giving them a catwalk even when they were hurt or angry. They could not afford to fight with them for the fear of losing their job.

In general, the fieldnotes describe how men physically dominate women, particularly those who are intoxicated women and entertainment workers (who are from poor, working class backgrounds). This context of gender and class inequality raises important concerns around women's abilities to negotiate condom usage during sexual intercourse.

Entertainment staff and client interactions

According to the community researchers, bar owners pressured "bar girls" (entertainment workers) to make money under the threat of job loss. Many of these young women came from smaller villages outside of Thimphu and therefore were expected to earn for their family. They often accrued tabs for food, drinks and sometimes rent, which they sought to pay off by attracting the attention of wealthier customers. Fieldnotes also describe situations in which customers fixed dates with the entertainer after club hours and by exchanging cell phone numbers:

The atmosphere of that club was noisy and crowded with the shouting and howling of the drunken people, on the other hand the volume of music was at high pitch. Some people were drunk and some were fixing dates with bar dancers. [Drayang]

I was sitting in one corner and watching how the peoples were interacting and behaving. I also saw some boys approaching the bar dancers.... They bought beers for those girls... I even noticed that they were exchanging the cell numbers. The girls were even given money to recharge their cell phone. [Drayang]

One of the CRs who knows a drayang owner insisted that the bar dancers do have sex in exchange for money.

The bar girls were walking up and down behaving in such a way, very freely and openly. I could really make out these girls are looking for some company. My friend, who is running a bar attached with snooker said, some girls amongst the dancer are also alcoholic and they are paid in return for sex too. [Dragang]

The CRs overheard customers in entertainment clubs not only negotiate prices to sponsor their singing but also for having sex after work hours. At most entertainment clubs, there was a core of regular clients that the dancers knew well. The CRs frequently witnessed some of the dancers leave with customers in their cars at the end of the night.

There were five female dancers who were dressed with bright colored wanju and tego with beautiful kira's, making them look beautiful and attractive. Some of the dancer girls seemed to know the guys, instead of writing request songs, they were writing love letters and asking them their rates for one night. The males usually came in groups where they enjoyed their drink and enjoyed flirting with the dancers. The males were even talking about the number of girls they slept with and how they came to know each other. The males were more in number and there were a few girls and women who come sit and enjoy the dance and songs. The crowd usually leave in two's or four's. Some customers take the dancer in the cars, and some even wait in the corridor for the dancer and other females. [Drayang]

[At closing time] Everybody was drunk and some left with their friends, while some waited for the drayang girls whom they had already had fixed dates with. Slowly people started leaving in groups and pairs. Two of the drayang girls left with two male costumers leaving their friends back. [Draying]

Fieldnotes described the formation of sexual networks between customers and bar dancers/singers as a regular part of their job. While dancers were certainly expected to flirt with customers to gain a sponsor and earn money for the bar owner, after hours they would choose to go with customers of their own choice. In other words, the fieldnotes suggest that “selling sex” was negotiated by the girls themselves without the mediation of bar owners.

Age/class power relations

A prominent theme running through the CRs' fieldnote related to “age, class and financial power”. Older men (defined by the CRs as 30+) were commonly found in the company of younger women (late teens to early 20s) at most of the venues. The CRs also noted many of the material exchanges that occurred between older men and young women.

To the back of my seat I saw six girls and four elderly men sitting and busy talking and also looking at the stage performance. The elderly man where offering the girls whatever they wanted to eat and drink. They were singing on top of their voice in group with the singer, laughing and hugging and the elderly men from time to time were rubbing the girls' thigh; and the girls' didn't mind and sometimes the girls even let the men kiss them on their cheek [bar and karaoke]

Consistently, CRs described scenes where men from more affluent backgrounds quickly attracted the attention of younger women.

An elderly man in his late forties with two teen girls arrived and [occupied] the vacant seat. Immediately after [occupying] the seat near me, the man asked the two girls what they would prefer to drink. The two girls were shy but the man asked for a spy wine and the two agreed. The waiter boy bought the wine and the man asks if they wanted anything to eat and the girls said no. The man was in

between them resting both his arms on the girls' shoulders and was enjoying. At that very moment a karaoke singer girl stepped down from the stage and joined them and now he was with three and I found him a real Mr. Bond in that posture. [bar and karaoke]

One of the girls said that her partner who is working in a private office did all the sponsoring for her drinks and was trying to flatter her and was trying his best to impress her by offering her drinks...and each time showing off with money in his purse .He was even telling her how much he earned and even tried to get closer and closer.. [Drayang]

A main ingredient in the formation of socio-sexual networks between older men and younger girls was the consumption of alcohol. Fieldnotes frequently discussed how older men “forced” younger women to consume alcohol until they were intoxicated.

The older man and some guys forced the ladies and the young girls to drink. Trying to make them get drunk by mixing coke with alcohol, so that it is easier for them to hook the ladies and then take them to Buddha point where couples usually go for dates. []

There were some older guys forcing the young ladies to drink although they were refusing to drink red wine and hard drink. They men kept forcing her to drink, so she finally gave up and started drinking red wine mixed with beer and hard drink which the man poured into her glass. Slowly the girl sat closer to the man and was even holding his hands and started whispering into the man's ears. The man made remarks and pulled the girl closer and closer to his side, pouring more drinks into her glass. Then they exchanged their mobile numbers and finished their drink in a hurry and stood up to leave. They left the place holding each other as the girl could bearly walk steadily. Buying three cans of beer while they were leaving.” [disco and Karaoke]

Economic power was not only wielded by older men over younger women; older more affluent women held influence over younger men. However, this took place primarily in discotheques.

Some elderly women and young guys were also drinking and gossiping and some pulling the guys to the dance floor. Some of the women were literally dancing on to the guys, smooching and hugging them tightly. [discotheque]

In the other corner I noticed the elder women with young guys were talking and holding hands and hugging each other. When the bill came the ladies were paying the bills instead of the guys. []

At around 12:10 pm a group of older ladies accompanied by young guys entered. They sat and ordered [the young guys'] drinks and were talking about how much

they lost while playing cards and how they managed to recover the money they lost. [Discotheque]

Alcohol and Drug Use

CRs consistently and frequently reported that men found intoxicated women to be more sexually accessible or susceptible to their advances.

Almost everyone in that club is drinking alcohol. After a while everyone was drunk and some dancing wildly. As they are all drunk it's easy for everyone to approach each other and make friends. Some are exchanging their mobile numbers and some dancing with their new partner. Men are very happy as most of the ladies are drunk and it's easy for them to go forward. I have noticed that the men are trying to buy more drinks to their girlfriend [club]

At the other table were older men with young ladies. [The men] were buying them hard drinks even when they were refusing to drink. They were literally forcing them to drink. After a while the girls started drinking bottles after bottles making them high.... And soon I noticed she was unable to walk straight or sit. [venue]

Fieldnotes described heavy alcohol consumption and drug use at the discotheques, as the following quote suggests:

Three younger ladies who were all dressed in mini [skirts] and boots were accompanied by their new boyfriends whom they had known through prank calls. They were telling each other about themselves. At first they were not really very comfortable with each other; but after finishing four or five bottles of beer and red wine [they were] talking to each other very openly, talking about their ex-boyfriends and girl friends that were good and bad past. They even talked about how much they could consume and which pills they took and how they behaved once they got drunk and especially when they ate two to three tabs of NT. [Club]

Summary

In sum, the fieldnotes reveals various gender-, age- and class-related power relationships that many structure HIV vulnerability. Indeed, these factors are well-documented in the cross-cultural literature to buttress women's HIV vulnerability (see for example Parker 2001, Shoenberger 2001). While women may know about the protective benefits of using condoms, they may be unable to effectively negotiate their usage with men given their economic dependence on men and, in the case of female entertainment workers, the need for job security. Furthermore their negotiated power is further undermined by alcohol over-consumption. Many of these themes are confirmed and expanded upon during the qualitative interviews.

Qualitative Interviews

Participants

A total of 40 individuals agreed to participate in in-depth qualitative interviews: 19 women and 21 men. Among female participants, 1/19 was married, 15/19 were single

and 3/19 were divorced. Female participant ranged in age from 18 to 36. The mean age was 22.4 and the mode was 19. Among male participants, 7 /21 were married, 11/21 were single, and 3/21 were divorced. Male participant ranged in age from 20 to 37. The mean age was 27.7 and the mode was 37. There were not great differences in the ranges of education backgrounds between male and female respondents recruited as participants. Education background ranged from “no formal education” to “college graduate”.

Thematic analysis

Connecting with sexual partners

Although cell phones were commonly used to connect with sexual partners, most female respondent connected with sexual partners in person at entertainment venue, bars and discos. Women perceived the consumption of alcohol and drugs as facilitating connections with potential sexual partners:

In order to be able to get sexual partners, we must first approach men and should give them company. So, they would give us treat, and sometimes, even some drugs in cigarettes, which make us senseless and, we end up going with them, to hotels. [ID #8]

I think that it'll be easy [for men] to get sexual partners, once they give some drinks to women... It's very easy [for us to find sex. Partner] if we go in very sexy dresses, since, men hardly resist temptations the moment they find us, and moreover, we're available for them if give us money. [FSW Id#2]

A young women who reported deriving an income from sex, discussed how she and her female peers acquired sexual partners.

Sometimes we get sexual partners through phone calls, etc. yet, most of the time we get from parties only, where they would offer us something and get influenced by them. We find youths a lot, but mostly land up getting only elderly men, who are wealthy and, of little higher standards [ID #6]

Consistently, female respondents reported their preference for older and wealthier men as sexual partners.

Although, youngsters are also available, most of the young girls normally prefer to go with elderly men only, because of the money. [ID#8]

One older woman explained why younger men were attracted to her circle of more affluent women.

My husband is abroad for 2 years.... No, we don't go to search [for sexual partners]. Instead, they [younger men] normally come to us when we go to parties, where all of us would get high after we give some drinks for them. Some, they even don't own houses to stay at night. Sometimes, there used to be

unemployed graduates, too. So they naturally turn to elderly women like us, for money. [ID #1]

Among most male respondents, alcohol consumption and economic necessity were central factors that created the connection to new sexual partners.

While comparing to other parts of the town it's quite easy to get sexual partners from this drayang, since most of the women who indulge in such things would come here, and of course, we can also find in Mila Drayang, as well. Mainly, it's this place, where we also get high after few cups of drinks and women who are in want of financial would come and ask us to sponsor some beers. By and large, we find mostly who like to indulge in sexual relations, only. [ID 25]

It starts first with few solitary cup of drinks in one of the corners of bar, where you take few more sips of beer and then get your self esteem little boosted, followed by full blown courage to go near women holding the cup in your hand and begin conversations with them. So, in the course of conversations we get to know each other, and after that everything flows naturally, until we get what we want.[M ID #23]

What you need to possess is also financial, and if, you've money and a car, no doubt, you'll be definitely in a better position to catch up some girls. That's confirmed, actually.[ID 24]

In fact, it's much easier to get those girls, who don't have family background, as such if we offer some drinks to them. But occasionally, we also need some kind of inborn talents, in order to be able to get or become successful.[ID#26]

Male respondents make a distinction between women who sell sex and those who do not. However, many perceive there to be little difference between the two groups within the context of a sexual relationship, as it is expected that the man will provide a women with money in exchange for sex, whether she is a sex worker or not.

While, there're some girls who go easily with us, after offering some drinks for a night or so, there others who wouldn't agree to our proposal; and even if they go with us, we must spent alot for them.[ID #26]

If what we get is only a kind of prostitute, it's as good as having a partner, since we can't afford to keep on paying her, all the time. And again, if we go for better ["quality"] it's all the same thing anyway, as we have to give them a lot. [ID #10]

Transactional sex and sex work

Female Respondents

When female respondents were asked about their experiences pertaining to receiving gifts and other material items in exchange for sex, many discussed how economic hardship had shaped their sexual practices.

We normally go out when boys ask us to accompany them, while we're in the club. Same thing happens in the next day with another new sexual partner, who would promise to give us something. Of course, I've one child, but we're divorced. Under such sad circumstances...when they promise us something, it's natural for us to indulge in sexual relations. [FSW, ID #4]

Though, I prefer to have only one sexual partner as a boyfriend, I sometimes end up being used by many men. This is mainly because of money that we need to have, as we all know that we can do nothing if you don't have money, especially in the place like Thimphu. As unemployed one the problems are inevitable, including the payment of house rent, and thus, have no option other than to do such things.[ID #8]

In addition to cash, female respondents had sex with men in exchange for material items such cell phones, food and clothing.

*It's mainly because when ourselves, unemployed have to stay far away from our own parents, who live in villages and has no other way to earn money to pay rent, foods and cloths, which in deed compel us to be available, for others .[ID #7]
Yes, I received gifts like some costly mobile phones, and cash, when I don't have money to pay rent as I'm staying in the rented house. [ID 6]*

Mostly, they give us money, but some new sexual partners used to give mobile phone and cloths, as well. However, for sexual intercourses if they don't give us some money we won't listen to them. Around two thousand, but sometimes, some give even more than that.[ID#5]

Well, some give us cash and, there're others who give gifts. But I don't admit gifts much, since I accept only cash. Some used to give me around twenty thousand, and sometimes, fifteen thousand. Anyway, fifteen thousand is the minimum that I usually get, when I receive in cash.[ID#8]

In order to attract young male sexual partners, one older female respondent explained how she had to provide cash and other gifts.

I don't know about my friends, but I used to give them some gifts either in form of mobile vouchers or, pocket money. Sometimes, I give [younger men] some amounts to go for parties, when I usually don't like to go myself. [ID # 1]

Male Respondents

Male respondents confirmed many of the responses of female interviewed, stating that they were expected to provide cash and gifts in exchange for sex.

Yes, definitely. We have to give some kind of gifts if we really want them for sex. Otherwise, it'll be difficult to get along with them. At the most we'll be spending minimum of ngultrum a thousand for their foods, drinks, and lodge.[ID#]

Since, Thimphu is now a city, where the need for money is felt by everybody and accounted for everything. So, money can do anything especially, in case of girl, who is far behind from the parents, who live in village and hence, nobody is there to oversee and guide them. Such girls therefore, become very easy-going, particularly when they need some cash.[ID #24]

I usually give them something, as far as I'm concerned. For instance, I gave some pocket money and a cloth to that woman with whom we had spent night in the hotel, even though my friend had nothing to give her. Anyway, whenever I get opportunity to be with women I always give them some pocket money and cloths of worth around one thousand six hundred, for a night. [ID 25]

Places for sex

Male and female participants alike reported that hotels were the most common place for having sex in Thimphu following a night of "partying". Respondents also reported having sex at Buddha point, BBS tower, Sangaygang, and in cars and at friends' homes.

*We go to rooms, and sometimes, at their house but mostly, in the [hotel] rooms: In Hotel John Keats, and Hotel 28, where I usually stay. [FSW, ID #30]
Mostly in Hotels, and if not, either at friends house or near BBS tower and Buddha point, when we for rides. [FSW, id7]*

I've seen my bachelor friends taking to their own house, Sangaygang, Buddha point, and if not, they end up, sometimes, doing in their car, itself. [M, id 24]

Mostly, we go to rooms when we've money. I'm not sure whether it's true, but others say that they used to go to places like Changlingmathang, where there are some corners to have sex. In our case, if we don't get rooms or its charges are so high then, we go to our friends' house, where we spend a night, together. [ID #25]

The most easiest and safe place is by booking hotels, only...We book it before hand, especially when we expect that we'll get one, surely and of course, sometimes we book it after parties, with the help of our friends... If it's during the summer time we do go for rides, but at this time of winter we go to hotels, only. [ID#26]

Multiple partners and concurrency

Almost all respondents (95%) reported having multiple sexual partners. Although physical appearance and charm were considered as desirable attributes by women, acquiring cash and material goods were considered to be main criteria for selecting sexual partners. Moreover, to ensure a continued flow of money and goods, most respondent preferred to acquire new partners and to avoid getting attached.

With same partner, soon after having once or twice sexual relations it eventually, gets fed up. I don't even like to look at them particularly, when we find different

smart men with thick purse. So basically at the end we, women would mostly go with smart men who have, really assure and give us more, only.[ID #4]

I prefer more different sexual partners. This is because we get many things, including how to enjoy sex. In fact, I prefer to have new sexual partners only; however, if there is no option other than to stick to old ones when we don't get new partners.[F #7]

If we stick to only one partner they often take advantage and don't give us much cash. Thus, it's always better to have more sexual partners, who we think will have more money.[Id #6]

We prefer more [sexual partners] Since what matters now a days is only money, and hence, if we go with more different men there're more chance of getting more money. [ID#5]

Basically, we're working for money, and if, we continue to with the same person he will not give us money as other new partners... We usually get sexual partners, after having exchanged our contact numbers, when we're dancing, together in the parties... They would normally give us money around five thousand, for the first time. However, they won't give us more than one thousand in the subsequent meetings, even if we ask for more and, that's the main reason why we always switch off to other new sexual partners [ID #2]

One can find in Hongkong market, where people play carom boards and from parties, as well. I don't like to have sex with the same person. It's as same as we like to taste different while we eat potato curry all the times....I don't enjoy sex with same person, and also, sometimes they force us without giving any cash. So, I go with others who give me more money. [FSW, ID #30]

Although this sexual network pattern appears to fit into a form of serial monogamy, it is important to note that many of the female respondents (**percentage**) also had at least one primary partners.

Yes I have a [primary] boyfriend... [But] I feel quite bored to have sex always with the same person. We in fact enjoy sex only when we're able to meet and get new sexual partners.[ID#8]

Like female respondent, male respondents stated that they preferred to change their sexual partners. The reason for this preference was explained in term of pleasure, taste and desire.

We, indeed, keep on changing as we like to have only different sexual partners, since being always with one doesn't give much pleasure, while having sex. [M, ID#23]

I personally like to have different sexual partners only. I think everyone will do same thing only, as we, men normally would say that we don't feel like to eat potato curry, all the time. So, if I get one new woman anytime, that's another possible way for me to switch off, to next sexual partner.[Di #24]

We got an opportunity to take one woman after giving some bottles of beer, etc., of worth around three thousand. Two of us, me and my friend took her to one of the hotels, where we had sex and spent night in the room. We had booked two separate rooms for three of us. We did in such a way that when I have sex with the woman my friend would stay in the next room until, I finished having sex, and likewise, same thing did when I took the rest. [ID 25]

Regarding to sexual partners we don't stick to one partner, at all. Rather, we go on changing, since we hardly meet the same women, with whom we had sexual relations in the past. I personally like to change sexual partners whenever possible, since if we stick always to one woman its nothing different from having same curry all the time.[ID 25]

It's an exceptional interest to have always changed my sexual partners, and it's as same as feeling good, when we change our cloths. In fact, it's a reality for which everyone loves to keep on changing their sexual partners and don't like to stick always to the same, old partner. [ID #10]

Although having new partners was preferred among male respondents, this was not always possible and for this reason, an individual looking for sex often connected with a previous sexual partner.

It happens, we end up being with the same partner, especially during parties on Saturday night, when we fail to get new sexual partners and meet her again.[ID#26]

More systematic sexual network mapping is required to ascertain the degree of sexual partner concurrency.

APPENDIX X: QUALITATIVE INDEPTH INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

ID #	Sex	Age	City/Town	Main Income	Secondary income	Highest level of education	Marital status
1	F	36	Paro	Business	Husband	8	Married
2	F	21	Thimphu	Parents	Sex	7	Single
3	F	24	Begana, Thimphu	Factory	Sex	Nil	Divorced
4	F	23	Thimphu	Market	Sex	Nil	Divorced
5	F	21	Decholing, T/phu	Parents	Sex	9	Single
6	F	24	Changzamtok, T/Phu	Parents	Sex	10	Single
7	F	22	Motithang, T/Phu	Parents	Sex	8	Single
8	F	18	Changzamtok, T/Phu	Parents	Sex	10	Single
9	M	37	Thimphu	Real Estate	Nil	12	Married
10	M	35	Thimphu	Business	Nil	12	Married
11	M	26	Thimphu	Unemployed	Nil	10	Divorced
12	M	34	Thimphu	Tourism	Nil	12	Single
13	M	25	Thimphu	Nil	Nil	Nil	Single
14	M	37	Thimphu	Business	Nil	Nil	Single
15	M	26	Thimphu	Corporate Employee	Nil	12	Married
16	M	22	Thimphu	Student	Nil	2 nd year College	Single
17	M	20	Thimphu	Parents	Parents	12	Single
18	M	22	Thimphu	Parents	Parents	12	Single
19	M	21	Thimphu	Parents	Parents	12	Single
20	M	21	Thimphu	Parents	Parents	11	Single
21	M	25	Thimphu	Parents	Nil	10	Married
22	M	28	Thimphu	Construction	Nil	12	Married
23	M	27	Paro	Student	Nil	1 st year College	Single
24	M	29	Thimphu	Parents	Nil	College Graduate	Single
25	M	27	Thimphu	Employed	Nil	9	Divorced
26	M	37	Thimphu	Employed	Nil	4	Divorced
27	M	24	Thimphu	Employed	Nil	10	Single
28	M	29	Thimphu	Parents	Nil	12	Married
29	M	30	Thimphu	Employed	Nil	8	Married
30	F	18	Jungshina, Thimphu	Sex- Worker	Peddling Drugs	Nil	Single
31	F	22	Thimphu	Nil	Nil	12	Single
32	F	21	Thimphu	Nil	Nil	11	Single

33	F	29	Thimphu	Business	Nil	12	Divorce
34	F	19	Paro	College Student	Nil	12	Single
35	F	19	Thimphu	Nil	Nil	8	Single
36	F	19	Paro	College Student	Nil	12	Single
37	F	19	Chanda Village, Chapcha	Dancer	Nil	8	Single
38	F	23	Chanda Village, Chapcha	Dancer	Nil	8	Single
39	F	24	Thimphu	Dancer	Weaving	10	Single
40	F	25	Thimphu	Dancer	Nil	8	Single