

**THE USE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION BY COUNSELORS IN GAY  
AND MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) COMMUNITIES AT THE BANDUNG  
ABIASA ASSOCIATION**

**Agus Setiaman<sup>1</sup>, Mitha Amelia<sup>2</sup>, Kismiyati El Karimah<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Communication Management, Universitas Padjadjaran  
(agus.setiaman@unpad.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Communication Management, Universitas Padjadjaran  
(mitha.amelia@unpad.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup>Department of Communication Management, Universitas Padjadjaran  
(miya.karimah@unpad.ac.id)

**Abstract.** Cases of AIDS are a lot found in the gay. This is why many people call it the term gay compromise syndrome. There are also those who call it GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency) or AID (Acquired Immunodeficiency Disease). Some even call it gay cancer. In the case of HIV / AIDS sufferers in Indonesia, there has been a significant increase from year to year. And the causes of this virus spread are the use of needle syringes alternately, blood transfusions, sexual relations, both between men and women, as well as same-sex or homosexual relationships. To help the sufferers, the Abiasa Association has voluntarily conducted HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) program. In the counseling process, the association has used interpersonal communication which has three levels. Each level is related to a number of "self" presented in an interpersonal situation, namely our view of ourselves, our view of others, and our view of others' views about us. This study aims to understand the use of effective interpersonal communication between Abiasa counselors and PLHA relating to HIV treatment. On the basis of the approach taken by the counselor, the study shows that the clients trust the counselor, feel the closeness with the counselor, and like the counselor because of having the closeness in Interpersonal Communication.

**Keywords:** (Interpersonal Communication; Counseling; HIV / AIDS; Gay and MSM)

## **INTRODUCTION**

As we all know that AIDS (Acquire Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a condition caused by a virus called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). This virus attacks the immune system which the human has. When the body's defense is weak or lost, we will be susceptible to infection even more serious things such as cancer. This situation is called OLS (Opportunistic Infections).

It's reported that people with HIV/AIDS in Indonesia have continued to increase from year to year. Gay and MSM are among the community groups that can be categorized as high risk groups. This is because their sexual behavior is free and the level use of condom among Gay and MSM is still relatively low. Although for cases in West Java PLHA (People Living with HIV / AIDS) who come from the Gay and MSM are still relatively small in number. But this does not indicate that there are no HIV / AIDS cases among Gays and MSM, due to the phenomenon of the iceberg that still needs to be revealed. Therefore the counseling program really needs counselors. Counselors can give positive support for PLHA in addition to their social environment. Counseling and support in providing correct information to PLHA about HIV / AIDS should be carried out correctly and directed.

The study of Gay and MSM is classified as many and covers many aspects studied, but the study of Gay and MSM in the perspective of communication, especially the use of interpersonal communication conducted by counselors in the Bandung Abiasa community is an interesting study and opens the treasury of health communication studies. Established for six years since June 2004, the Abiasa Association has made various efforts so that the communication delivered by the counselor is embedded in the counselee's mind. Communication conducted by counselors in the Abiasa association is in the forms of interpersonal communication and group communication, but interpersonal communication is more often used because it is more effective in changing the attitudes, opinions and behavior.

The study about the use of interpersonal communication in the process of HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) is covered in two questions, as follows:

1. How is the use of interpersonal communication in the PLHA counseling activities with the Gay and MSM communities in Bandung Abiasa Association?
2. Why is counseling needed in the program of Behavior Change Communication HIV/AIDS for Community of PLHA Gay and MSM in the Bandung Abiasa Association?

## **METHOD**

The case study, according to Mulyana [2001], is a comprehensive description and explanation of various aspects of an individual, a group, an organization or community, a program, or a social situation. Whereas Yin [2006] gave opinion that case study is a strategy that is appropriate to answer the focus of research that has the question "how" and "why". As one of the qualitative methods, case study approach can be applied to various fields including interpersonal communication, and others. The conclusions from the case studies obtained from the research can not be generalized to all cases, but only limited to a particular case that is being investigated on a particular object or in the company concerned. There was no standard format in the research report using the case study method. Some cases can generalize theories, some are descriptions of cases or data, and others are natural analyzes and display opposing cases or comparison between cases. In this study, using a descriptive case study type, in which the results of the study can provide an in-depth or detailed description of the Behavior Change Communication HIV / AIDS For Community program in Abiasa Association.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 The Use of Interpersonal Communication in Counseling Activities of PLHA Gay and MSM in the Abiasa Association.**

Counseling puts communication as the main element in its implementation, or the most urgent tool compared to other elements. Counseling requires communication because in counseling, it will talk a lot between two people, namely the counselor and counselee. Interpersonal communication is a communication activity that is most often done by humans. Rueshch and Bateson in Little John [1978] in Liliweri [1994: 3], explained that the most important level in communication between humans is interpersonal communication (which is interpreted as an individual relationship with others in their social context). Through this process individuals adjust themselves to others through a role called transmitting and receiving.

Counseling program in the Abiasa Association is a voluntary program which mostly used interpersonal communication. Counseling is carried out before and after the HIV test. Counseling

is needed for communities who are at risk in sexual behavior. Counseling is the most important part of HIV testing procedures. Counseling is provided to help identify behaviors or activities that can be a means of HIV transmission, provide information about HIV / AIDS and HIV testing, ways to prevent HIV transmission, and give moral support for behavior changes to undergo life healthier and more secure. The aim of making counseling program special for Gay and MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) is to help reduce risk factors for getting HIV during safe sexual intercourse. The Abiasa Association provides an explanation about factors of risky sex for HIV through oral sex, vaginal and anal sex. The association makes counseling program due to the background of Gay and MSM which tend to be infected with HIV / AIDS. It is because of the lifestyle of these gays who many intersect with the sources of the HIV / AIDS virus. In counseling, communication is reflected in the attitude that the counselor gives to the client which includes some general principles of counseling:

- **Listening.** This means the counselor must be silent for a few moments and allow the conversation to flow so that the client talks more than the counselor.
- **Asking with good questions.** This is a way for the client to see the problem from a different perspective and help the counselor understand the situation.
- **Provide the right information.** In this case the counselor should not ignore the question if he/she still does not understand about what is disclosed by the client.
- **Maintain client confidence.** This is to make client feel appreciated and his rights protected [HIV/AIDS counseling, 2002: 4]

The counseling program consists of two people namely counselor and counselee. Counseling program is really needed by the community engaged in NGOs for handling HIV / AIDS. Interpersonal communication can be used in counseling because interpersonal communication can meet the social and psychological needs of humans, in which humans need to express their feelings and need others who understand the condition of each other. With interpersonal communication, we usually start conversations about deep feelings, can share personal stories, listen to others with empathy and understanding. Interpersonal communication is communication between people face to face that ensures each participant captures the reactions of others directly both verbally and non-verbally (Mulyana, 2001). In counseling, communication is reflected in the attitude that the counselor gives to the client which includes some general principles of counseling:

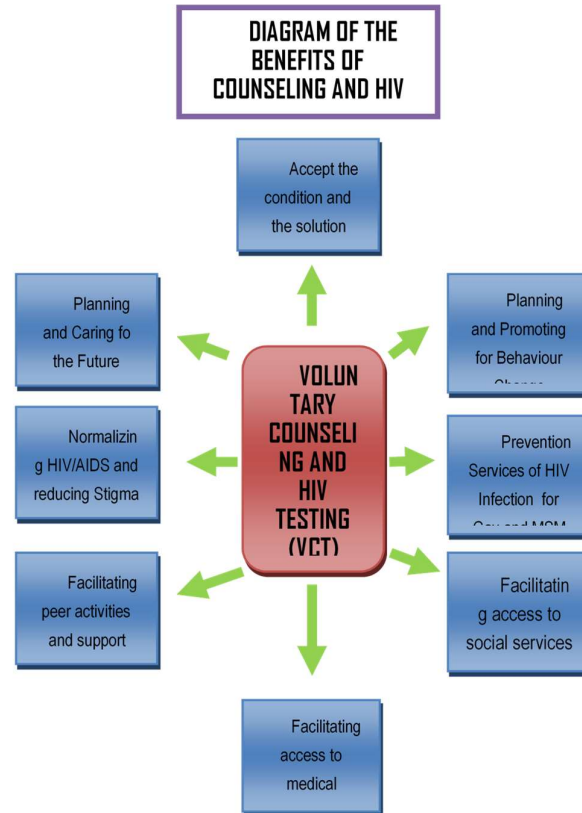
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Counselors in the community on counseling programs use interpersonal communication and group communication. The use of interpersonal communication is more often used as face to face communication in counseling. Interpersonal communication is very important for counseling programs, because in interpersonal communication, the consellor can see what is wanted and felt by the counselee. Interpersonal communication can solve personal problems. As Mulyana (2001:

73) said that communication experts believe that effective communication in conveying and receiving messages is through face-to-face communication, because the communicatee's frame of reference can be known by the communicator directly. Whereas group communication, carried out with small groups, can even change the attitudes, opinions and behavior of the communicatee, but it is not as effective as interpersonal communication because group communication, both large communication and small communication, is more rational. Group communication which is held in a community known as *Ngobras (NGObrol BaReng AbiaSa)* is to find out the needs of the community and what the community wants.

Group counseling occurs at the mobile clinic when there are many participants and are not accommodated by the counselor, then there is group counseling in pre-HCT counseling. The counselor calls 10 people for pre-testing counseling. But still counseling individually so they can utter issues that are impossible to express in front of their partners such as risky behavior in the past. Couples also need to be explored the possibility of changes in sexual activity such as, bisexual. Most studies of counseling about partners report their success in changing behavior to prevent HIV transmission to their HIV negative partners. Group communication will be carried out if the partner agrees to have counseling. Small group communication in counseling occurs with client approval. Pre-testing counseling is counseling or early communication in providing an explanation of HIV / AIDS, STDs (Sexually Transmitted Infections) and ways in which the HIV / AIDS virus can transmit the disease. If seen from the effectiveness of message delivery, personal counseling is certainly more effective. This is because it is easier to give understanding to a client than when they come in a group, because not everyone in the group can understand the message easily. Suppose a couple comes, one understands, the other does not understand and sometimes they like to interpret beyond the counselor's explanation.

The benefits of HIV counseling and testing are that the client will get coaching about HIV in more comprehensive in the process of HCT (HIV Counseling and Testing). The counselor acts as a loyal listener and someone who can guarantee the confidentiality of information provided by the client. This brainstorming activity will really help the client because the counselor seems to be best person who can understand how he feels. This interaction can reduce the burden in client's mind. By saying what problems the has, the counselor and the client can both find solutions to the crisis the client is experiencing.



**Fig. 1.** Diagram of the Benefits of HIV Counseling and Testing

Pre-test counseling challenges the counselor to be able to make a balance between providing information, assessing risk and responding to the emotional needs of the client. Many people are afraid of taking an HIV test for various reasons including discrimination and stigmatization of the society and family. VCT services always protect clients by maintaining confidentiality. Placing the client's trust in the counselor is the main basis for maintaining confidentiality so that good relations of mutual understanding can be fostered. Something that is the responsibility of the counselor. The use of counseling skills is crucial to fostering rapport and demonstrating client-focused services.

The process of counseling after the pre-test is known as post-test counseling that aims to inform the test results to the client. It is just a notification of the test results, the counselor will consider the situation and conditions before reading out the test results. Before reading the test results, the counselor develops a relationship with the counslee to check the mental status and readiness of the counslee. When the counslee is ready, the counselor will immediately read the results, between positive and negative test results. Before reading the test results the counselor will consider the condition of the client, if the client's physical health meets and is better at responding to the results, he will be notified.

According to Counselor Asep, a counselor is a neutral person who does not side with anyone according to the status or ability of the client. Client's lack of confidence usually results in anxiety in the client. As counselors, they must have extensive knowledge about HIV / AIDS and how to manage themselves so as not to dissolve in the despair of clients, because counselors

unconsciously sometimes dissolved in an atmosphere of empathy and sympathy. There are times when a client who is very desperate does not want to listen to his counselor and closes himself by not answering the questions given by the counselor or does not come counseling at the time and opportunity that has been given. The combination of motivation, knowledge and skills leads to a competent communicator. The characteristic of the counseling is that there are two people interacting, one person tells the problem and the other listens to achieve the goal of the same meaning of communication. Therefore the counselor asks people to speak honestly and look at themselves and make choices about how to make changes happen, so the counselor himself must let himself open. Corey [1995: 61] explained that:

“Counselors can get extensive knowledge of theories and practices and can pass it on to their clients. But they also bring themselves as individuals into therapy sessions if the counselors are required to courage growth and change in the clients, they must have the ability to encourage growth in their lives by exploring their own choices and decisions.”

Counselor always talks about the topic of sex to clients, because seeing the background of the Gay community and MSM has sexual risk. And most clients don't know safe sex education. If the result is HIV positive, the counselor will give time for the client to be able to control his own emotional and mental. The counselor will leave the client to think. This is used by the counselor to calm himself. Because it is not easy for the counselor to tell the test result if the test result he obtained was positive. Counselor provides spiritual values related to AIDS, birth and death. Counselor gives confidence and convince the client that there is life beyond death, so that client who has HIV positive can accept his condition more calmly. However the counselor oftentimes sees client's face expression which regards that HIV positive is a curse from God, so naturally the client with HIV positive will feel guilty and rejection to himself.

In a conversation with one of the PLHA (who did not want to be named) admitted that he purposely hid his mother that he was HIV positive because he did not want to add his mother's burden et alone he was Gay. The counselor understands his feelings and will continue to keep his condition a secret from his family. The feedback the client receives is in the form of counselor affirmation.

#### **4.2. Reasons for Conducting Counseling in the program of Behavior Change Communication HIV/AIDS for Community of PLHA Gay and MSM in the Abiasa Association**

According to counselors Joko, Asep, Kiki and Ikin, it's important for clients to get guidance to open their horizons about HIV, especially clients having more at risk in the HIV virus. The client will share his insights with his friends about the dangers of the HIV virus.

This guidance is also important because the closeness of the group is a factor that makes client fall in the dangerous condition. It's hard to be separated from a group that the client feels comfortable in and it's very difficult not to follow the way of life in gay group. Closeness of such group is still a problem that must be solved between counselor-client. Especially for gays and MSM, to really get out of the group is a rather difficult thing. They are usually bound because they usually know each other and share with each other. This is called peer-pressure. Peer-pressure is motivated through a situation that they are familiar with and they call it a challenge (it could be a threat) and their solidarity is very high especially in MSM (transgenders), they are bound to one another. This condition can be very dangerous for members in the group because

knowledge of the possible impacts can be very minimal or unknown at all. The benefits of counseling are providing knowledge about HIV / AIDS.

Counseling is a very important aspect in providing health services to clients. By doing counseling means the counselor has helped the client decide a health problem so that makes the client feel satisfied and confident. Counseling also influences the interaction between counselors and clients by increasing existing relationships and trust. In this globalization era, in addition to clinical interests, counseling also places more emphasis on developing individual potentials, namely intellectual, affective, social, emotional, and religious aspects. Therefore, Willis [2004] concludes that:

Counseling is a relief effort given by a coach (advisor) who is trained and experienced, to individuals who need it, so that the individuals can develop their potentials optimally, be able to overcome the problem, and be able to adjust to the ever changing environment.

But often counseling is ignored and not implemented properly because the counselor does not have much time for the client, time constraints make the client feel having not enough time to chat with the counselor.

Outreach to the existence of MSM, will open the road to their openness, if closed then the door of the invention and other interventions is difficult to open. The association is the government's door to enter the MSM group. Counselors choose social pressure because of the high number of MSM and male and female partners, increasing the risk of HIV for their sexual partners and decreasing the openness of their identification as MSM actors. There are MSM who engage in sexual activities with other men for reasons of money or pleasure. They are very low vulnerable to HIV transmission, because not often and because they can force their "customers" to use 100% condoms. Barriers to HCT in MSM and gays are not found by the counselors, because counselors are both from the community. But if counselors are not from the community there are obstacles similar to the denial of the existence of MSM, then the service to them is also veiled with the following reasons:

- Stigma or criminalization
- There is no reliable data of epidemiological information
- Difficult to reach MSM
- Inadequate or insufficient health services
- Lack of attention from donor funds or government in providing service to MSM.
- Lack of attention from the AIDS national program
- Fear is expressed to families or if they are referred to as MSM, fear is ostracized and abandoned without the ability of safe sex negotiation skills.

With this situation Johnson [1981] in Supratiknya, [1995: 10-11], explained that, the counselors should have basic communication skills:

1. They must be able to understand each other. In detail, this ability includes several sub abilities, namely an attitude of trust, self-disclosure, self-realization and self-acceptance.
2. They must be able to communicate their thoughts and feelings precisely and clearly. Show a warm attitude, listen in a way that will show that we understand our communication opponents (clients).
3. They must be able to accept and support one another or help one another so that people can find constructive solutions.

4. Being able to solve conflicts and other forms of personal problems that may arise in our communication with others.

The counseling process can be achieved because of good relations. The communication relationship itself is pursued by the counselor in the counseling process that includes :

1. **Having a relationship.** The counselors must create an atmosphere that makes the client feel relaxed, not afraid, feel safe and free to express feelings and questions in his heart to be discussed.
2. **Exploration.** The counselor must know deeply about the client's feelings, the client's situation and the reason for coming to ask for help.
3. **Understanding.** The counselor helps clients identify problems and causes of problems, and helps clients design alternative solutions to problems.
4. **Planning for Activities.** Making plans to help clients know and understand their choices or suggestions that may not have been considered by the clients. [HIV / AIDS counseling, 2002: 44]

The association organizes outreach programs by health workers, to suitable places such as disco, parks where MSM often gather, gay people who work as commercial sex workers, sex workers become easy targets for extortion and thuggery. Amid the crush of shame and fear, they seek recognition and treatment in the same way. "Cats" usually offer "service" at midnight in the field Gasibu, Bandung, West Java. This is a place for male prostitutes.

Counseling is also a media for counselors to manage crisis. The negative impact of counseling usually arises due to the stigma associated with receiving counseling services and HIV testing and trauma arising from receiving test results. There are clients who can directly express their inability to deal with this problem but there are also those who behave in certain ways such as isolating themselves or refusing to do daily activities. The counselor must conduct a risk assessment, responsible for entering into an agreement with the client / family / partner to prevent things that endanger themselves and those closest to the client.

Motivating clients by including elements of support, encouragement and care earlier, it is hoped that clients can remain strong. Therefore, to achieve change by previously removing them from their own fears, from the stigma that may also arise, the counselor must be willing to take the time and energy to always help the client.

## CONCLUSION

1. The use of interpersonal communication of counselor in counseling is a stage that involves HIV pre-test, the presence of meetings, introduction, familiarity, until post-test that is a deep relationship between counselor and clients through behavior to help clients get out of pressure.
2. Counseling is a very important aspect in providing health services to clients. Clients are very important to get counseling guidance because with counseling guidance, clients will open their horizons about HIV, especially clients more at risk in the HIV virus.



## LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This study focuses on the use of interpersonal Communication in Counseling Activities of PLHA Gay and MSM and find out the reasons why conducting counseling in the program of Behavior Change Communication HIV/AIDS for Community of PLHA Gay and MSM in the Abiasa Association. So, this study does not show the result of using the method to change the behaviour. In the future, we plan to have a study using quatitative method to measure how effective the use of interpersonal communication in counselling process to change the behaviour of PLHA Gay and MSM in the Abiasa Association.

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