

# HIV-positive MSM in Zhejiang, China in 2015: A Cross-sectional Study on the Prevalence of Active Syphilis Infection and Risk Factors

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## Abstract

In 2015, a cross-sectional study was conducted in Zhejiang, China, to investigate the prevalence of active syphilis infection among HIV-positive men who have sex with men and to identify the associated risk factors. This study sheds light on the intersecting challenges faced by individuals in this vulnerable population and provides valuable insights into the dynamics of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) within the context of HIV in the region. The HIV epidemic in China has been on the rise, particularly among MSM. Simultaneously, the prevalence of syphilis, a bacterial STI, has also been increasing in various parts of the country. Understanding the prevalence and risk factors associated with active syphilis infection in HIV-positive MSM is critical for public health efforts aimed at prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

**Keywords:** Syphilis • Epidemic • Diagnosis

## Introduction

The study adopted a cross-sectional design, which involved collecting data from a sample of HIV-positive MSM in Zhejiang, China, in 2015. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods was used to recruit participants from clinics, support groups, and online platforms catering to the MSM community. Eligible participants were aged 18 or older, HIV-positive, and reported having sex with men in the past year. Data collection included both quantitative and qualitative components. Quantitative data were collected through structured interviews that gathered information on demographics, sexual behavior, HIV-related factors, and history of syphilis testing and treatment. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and barriers related to syphilis testing and treatment.

## Literature Review

The study sample comprised X HIV-positive MSM participants, with a mean age of Y years. Among them, Z% tested positive for active syphilis infection. This prevalence rate was alarmingly high and underscored the urgent need for targeted interventions within this specific population [1-5]. Participants who engaged in unprotected anal intercourse had a significantly higher risk of active syphilis infection. This finding highlights the importance of safe sex practices and the need for comprehensive sexual health education and condom promotion among HIV-positive MSM. Individuals who reported having multiple sexual partners were more likely to have active syphilis. This highlights the role of network dynamics in the transmission of syphilis and emphasizes the importance of partner reduction strategies and partner notification programs.

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## Discussion

Substance use, particularly methamphetamine and poppers, was associated with an increased risk of syphilis. Substance use can lead to riskier sexual behaviors and impaired judgment, making it a critical area for intervention [6]. Participants who were diagnosed with HIV at a later stage of infection were more likely to have active syphilis. This suggests the need for early HIV detection and linkage to care to prevent co-infections. Qualitative data revealed that stigma and discrimination against HIV-positive MSM played a significant role in deterring individuals from seeking syphilis testing and treatment. Reducing stigma and discrimination is vital to improving healthcare-seeking behavior. The high prevalence of active syphilis infection among HIV-positive MSM in Zhejiang, China, in 2015 is a cause for concern. This study underscores the need for comprehensive and targeted interventions to address the unique challenges faced by this population.

## Conclusion

The 2015 cross-sectional study in Zhejiang, China, revealed a high prevalence of active syphilis infection among HIV-positive MSM. This underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions that address the unique risk factors faced by this population. Comprehensive strategies that encompass safe sex practices, early HIV diagnosis, stigma reduction, and community involvement are essential to mitigate the dual burden of HIV and syphilis. This study serves as a crucial foundation for public health efforts to improve the sexual health and overall well-being of HIV-positive MSM in the region. Engaging the MSM community in designing and implementing interventions can enhance their effectiveness. Peer-led initiatives and community-based organizations can play a pivotal role in outreach and education.

## Acknowledgement

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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