

## View Point

### Growing Homophobia due to Monkeypox Outbreak in 2022

**Mariam Ansar<sup>1</sup>, Arkaketan Chatterjee<sup>2</sup>, Sumit Roy Chowdhury<sup>3</sup>**

Homophobia in the context of certain diseases has always been prevalent ever since the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. With the outbreak of Monkeypox in 2022, there were several misconceptions regarding its transmission which led to stigmatisation of Homosexuals. Through this article we examine the established mechanisms of transmission of this virus and hence attempt to dispel such misconceptions which cause a significant psychological impact on this population.

[*J Indian Med Assoc* 2023; **121**(7): 73]

**Key words :** Monkeypox, Homophobia, Social medicine, Communication.

The emerging multi-country Monkeypox outbreak in 2022 has exacerbated the stigma revolving around Homophobia and diseases associated with them. United Nations' Aids agency denounced the homophobic and racist reports on Monkeypox spread in May<sup>1</sup>. The modes of monkeypox virus transmission needs emphasis so that we can battle this growing fear in people due to misinformation and adequate response to the current outbreak can be made in an effective manner.

Monkeypox (MPX) is a zoonotic orthopoxvirus that was first isolated from a patient with suspected Smallpox infection in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1970<sup>2</sup>. According to latest World Health Organisation (WHO) reports this year, there have been 3413 laboratory confirmed cases and one death from 50 countries/territories in five WHO Regions<sup>3</sup>.

WHO released a public health advise for Homosexual, Bisexual and other men who have sex with men and emphasised the need to stop stigmatising people as any human could get this disease and pass it onto another regardless of their sexuality. Transmission can occur from animal to human, human to human and from contaminated environments to humans. It is found to spread via direct contact with someone infected with a rash or scab, or contact with objects including clothing, beddings or surfaces used by them. It can spread via respiratory droplets, bodily fluids including pus, oral, anal, and vaginal secretions<sup>4</sup>.

Monkeypox is not a 'Gay Disease', although it is more frequently being diagnosed in this community in recent times because of several reasons. Around 40% of the homeless youth belong to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community due to strong rejection from their families. These people are more likely to have depression, use illegal drugs and have unsafe sex. Racism and economic burden for this community is another important factor why they are susceptible to the

spread of infections. Monkeypox rashes resemble skin lesions in sexually transmitted diseases including herpes, syphilis and the generalised lymphadenopathy resembles diseases like Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Because of the positive health seeking behaviour in homosexuals due to their pre-existing high risk of sexually transmitted diseases, Monkeypox cases have been found to be diagnosed in them more frequently at sexual health clinics<sup>5</sup>. Studies have shown that the discrimination of Homosexuals in 1980's fuelled the AIDS pandemic as well<sup>6</sup>.

Due to the growing number of Monkeypox cases, the authors feel the urgent need for good quality education among the masses for disease burden reduction. Multiple social factors impact the health behaviour of Homosexuals in our community. It is our responsibility to make them feel safe to seek health facilities whenever required. Schools and workplace education and behavioural modification should be ensured to prevent criminalising them.

Isolation of confirmed patients and local confinement of suspected cases, regular soap/alcohol based hand wash, disinfection of clothes and surfaces, wearing protective personal equipment (including Gloves, Masks, Gowns, Goggles), keeping active lesions covered with clothing and most importantly proper knowledge has shown to decrease spread of this disease and is the best way to curb the Worldwide outbreak of Monkeypox.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/23/un-denounces-homophobic-and-racist-reporting-on-monkeypox-spread> . Accessed 27 June 2022
- 2 Moore M, Zahra F. Monkeypox. 2022 May 22. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2022 Jan.
- 3 World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2022-DON396>. Accessed 27 June 2022
- 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/about.html>. Accessed 27 June 2022
- 5 World Health Organization. [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/hq-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-library/public-health-advice-for-msm-on-monkeypox-22-may-2022.pdf?sfvrsn=7648499\\_29&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/hq-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-library/public-health-advice-for-msm-on-monkeypox-22-may-2022.pdf?sfvrsn=7648499_29&download=true) . Accessed 27 June 2022
- 6 American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/exchange/2012/04/discrimination-homophobia>. Accessed 27 June 2022

<sup>1</sup>MBBS, Junior Resident, Department of General Medicine, Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata 700073 and Corresponding Author

<sup>2</sup>MBBS, Junior Resident, Department of General Surgery, Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata 700073

<sup>3</sup>MD, Senior Resident, Department of Neuroanaesthesiology and Critical Care, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi 110029

**Received on : 15/07/2022**

**Accepted on : 27/07/2022**