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## Original Research

# Life satisfaction and its associated factors among money boys in China

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Money Boy (MB) is a unique term used in China referring to a specialized population of men who sell sex to other men. Life satisfaction can influence one's health-related behaviors. The aim of our study was to find out the situation of MBs' life satisfaction and its associated factors.

**Study design:** A cross-sectional study among MBs was conducted between July and December 2013 in Hunan province, China.

**Methods:** Respondent-driven sampling method was used for recruitment, with the initial seven 'seeds' found from a gay dating website, and 234 participants were enrolled into the study. They were asked to complete a questionnaire about their demographic characteristics, work experience as MB, family environment, health-related behaviors, status of self-esteem, self-stigma, and perceived life satisfaction. Descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis were applied.

**Results:** There were 205 valid questionnaires collected. The results showed that MBs' life satisfaction score was  $17.9 \pm 6.3$ . The multiple linear regression model identified five factors correlated with MBs' life satisfaction. Three factors were found to be positively correlated with life satisfaction, consistent condom use with clients ( $\beta = 3.093$ ,  $P = 0.010$ ), interpersonal relationship ( $\beta = 1.027$ ,  $P = 0.017$ ), and self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.253$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ). And two factors were found to be negatively correlated with life satisfaction, seeking for clients through mommy's arrangement ( $\beta = -2.091$ ,  $P = 0.019$ ) and had ever gotten at least one kind of sexually transmitted disease (STDs) ( $\beta = -1.971$ ,  $P = 0.034$ ).

**Conclusions:** The present study contributed to a better understanding of MBs' life satisfaction and behavioral and other psychosocial features. It is suggested that comprehensive interventions involving behavioral and psychosocial health promotion approaches are needed for this population. Those programs will be more acceptable among this group and tend to be sustainable.

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## Introduction

Money boys (MBs) is a unique term used in China, referring to men who sell sex only to men.<sup>1</sup> It is different from male sex workers, as some clients of the male sex workers are women.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that there are 380,000 MBs in China.<sup>3</sup>

MBs suffer from multilayered stigma. First, this population have been confronting with human immunodeficiency virus/sexually transmitted diseases (HIV/STDs)–related stigma. As multiple types of HIV-related risk behaviors exist among this population, such as non-consistent condom use, polydrug use, lack of access to healthcare services, MBs are disproportionately affected by HIV/STDs infection. A previous study found that the HIV prevalence among MBs in China was 6.0%. In addition, about half of the MBs self-identified as bisexual or heterosexual, which indicates that they may be sexually inclined toward male as well as female. MBs have been regarded as a bridge of HIV/STDs transmission across different gender groups.<sup>4</sup> Second, sex work has long been regarded as illegal and immoral in China. Chinese citizens hold negative attitudes toward this population. Third, although not all of the MBs are non-heterosexual, the majority (over 80%) of MBs are self-identified as homosexual or bisexual,<sup>4</sup> and sexual minorities that are not yet widely understood and accepted by the public.

Life satisfaction regards a person's general assessment of the quality of his own life according to his chosen criteria. It refers to the cognitive-judgmental aspects of one's well-being and stands for overall satisfaction with one's life.<sup>5,6</sup> Theories about life satisfaction, such as need and goal satisfaction theories, argued that individuals gain happiness when they move toward an ideal status or accomplish a valued aim. The reduction of tension, as well as satisfaction of biological and psychological needs and goals will lead to life satisfaction. It was concluded that people who are satisfied with their own life tend to appear young, be healthy, well educated, sociable, having optimistic attitudes, being married person, satisfied with own job, and with high self-esteem.<sup>7,8</sup> The number of social interactions,<sup>9</sup> parental and family factors could also affect one's self-concept and perception of general satisfaction with life.<sup>10</sup> Unemployment condition was supposed to have a devastating impact on one's life satisfaction for causing obvious financial difficulties. And existence of love relationship was a significant predictor of life satisfaction.<sup>11</sup>

Life satisfaction is also correlated with one's health-related behaviors. A study of female sex workers in Hong Kong showed that this population suffered from poor self-esteem, pessimistic future expectation, low degree of life satisfaction, and these were associated with inconsistent condom use and decreased utilization of relevant prevention services such as HIV testing and STDs checkups.<sup>12</sup> And higher life satisfaction could significantly improve individuals' health condition, work and income, to help them gain more supportive social relationships and social benefits.<sup>13</sup> People with higher life satisfaction have fewer life-style problems, such as drug addiction or alcohol abuse and tend to have more health seeking and health-promoting behaviors.<sup>14,15</sup>

MBs are recognized as a high risk, stigmatized, and marginalized group. Most of the existing studies pay attention

to behavioral characteristics and behavioral interventions. A comprehensive health promotion program which contains behavioral and psychosocial aspects is supposed to be the most effective intervention. MBs may endure low level of life satisfaction and health service, but there were few studies which take MBs' life satisfaction into consideration. In this study, we investigate behavioral and psychosocial characteristics of this group and find out their correlation with MBs' life satisfaction. We hypothesized that those comprehensive factors such as their working experience and self-stigma as MB, self-esteem, and health-related behaviors are correlated with their perceived satisfaction with life. Results of our study will be of significance to provide evidence for designing and implementing a health promotion program from integrated aspects of this population. The program can improve MBs' health behaviors as well as their life satisfaction, and the intervention which take mental health and life satisfaction into consideration will be more acceptable among MBs. So findings of this study will have guidance significance for public health.

The objectives of the present study were (1) to discover the condition of life satisfaction and (2) to find out behavioral and psychosocial factors related to MBs' life satisfaction. This would be the first study from the aspect of MBs' satisfaction with life in China.

## Methods

### Participants

Sampling eligible criteria include: (1) male who is 16 years or older; (2) self-identified as MB, an MB was defined as a man who had provided sex services (receptive and/or insertive) to other men for a fee within the previous 3 months; and (3) the ability to provide written and verbal consent. Ethical approval was issued by the ethical committee of the Third Xiangya Hospital, Central South University. Two well-trained researchers made a brief introduction of the purpose and methodology of the study, confidentiality, benefits/potential risks (including referrals for other services). After signing an informed consent form, each participant was asked to complete the questionnaires. They were all given the freedom to withdraw from the study without any penalty. Sample size was 256, and details of sample size calculation were described at another article.<sup>16</sup>

### Materials and procedure

#### Recruitment

MBs are a hidden population and their behaviors cannot be observed by traditional sentinel surveillance in China. There are 14 cities in Hunan province. Most of the cities have gay clubs, with 10–15 MBs in each club. Many MBs are organized in a club by a man they call 'mommy', who arranges contacts with clients and MBs. All of the clubs prefer to advertise on the gay-dating websites. We have found 40 clubs on a gay chat room website of Hunan. It is estimated that there are 400–600 MBs in Hunan province. A respondent-driven sampling system<sup>17</sup> was conducted for recruitment. It is a network sampling

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