

Unprotected Sexual Behaviour among Truck Drivers in Kerala

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview on unprotected Sexual Behavior among Truck Drivers in Kerala.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS Information, Education and Communication (IEC) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

1. Introduction

In India, HIV/AIDS epidemic has emerged as the most serious public health problem since independence. The truck drivers, due to the migratory nature of their occupation and being far away from their families for a long time tend to have multiple sexual partners and visit commercial sex workers. The truck drivers thus constitute a well-known high risk group of population in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Earlier studies in India have documented a gradual increase in knowledge about HIV infection, safe sexual behavior among truck drivers, the present study was carried out to study the knowledge and practices regarding HIV/ AIDS among truck drivers, the prevalence of unsafe sexual behavior and condom use so as to formulate an Information, Education and Communication (IEC) package regarding HIV/AIDS, other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), safe sex and condom use.

2. Objectives

To study the knowledge of long distance truck drivers about HIV/AIDS and to study the unprotected sexual behavior of these drivers with reference to HIV/AIDS.

3. Material and methods

Long distance truck drivers plying on national highways passing through Trivandrum -Palakkadu national Highway No. 47 who halted at road side group of "Dhabas" (road side hotels) at Valayar in Palakkadu district, Kerala (India) were enrolled in a cross-sectional study conducted for 5 days in March 2016 between 1800 hrs - 2300 hrs. A total of 100 truck drivers could be approached over a period of 5 days. All interviewers were properly trained and briefed for administering the questionnaire. All the truck drivers who stopped at the dhabas were invited to participate and those who consented for the interview were taken to a separate enclosure in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The questionnaire was administered using personal face-to-face interview techniques. The questionnaire was suitably modified after the pilot study. The data of this pilot study has not been included in the final

analysis.

4. Results

Total of 100 truck drivers were included in the final analysis. Socio-demographic profile: Mean age of truck drivers was 28.97 years. (10.61%) truck drivers were less than or equal to 20 years of age, (47.35%) were between 21-30 years and (42.04%) were more than 30 years of age. (54.06%) of truck drivers were from Maharashtra, (14.49%) were from Karnataka and rest of them were from other states. (65.37%) were married. (24.39%) drivers had studied less than 6th class, (64.66%) between 6th and 10th class and rest had studied beyond 10th class. Knowledge about HIV/AIDS: 275 (97.2%) truck drivers were aware of HIV/AIDS. Out of these, (67.28%) got information from Mass media, (24.72%) from their peer group, (5.28 %) from NGOs or doctors and only (2.18%) were told about HIV/ AIDS in their schools. For comparing the awareness level about HIV transmission, truck drivers were divided according to their education level into three groups - educated less than 6th class, from 6th to 10th class and more than 10th class. Overall (94.6%) of the drivers were aware that HIV can be transmitted by heterosexual route, (86.2%) were aware about transmission by contaminated needle and (84.4%) were aware about transmission by blood transfusion. However, knowledge about transmission from pregnant mother to her unborn child, through breast-milk and homosexual route was less being (69.9%), (56.6%) and (46.29%) respectively. On analysis of data on the basis of educational status, it was found that there was statistically significant difference in knowledge of transmission of HIV/AIDS by different modes of transmission except for transmission by heterosexual route and breast feeding. It was observed that misconceptions about HIV transmission are quite prevalent among truck drivers. About (26.5%) felt that AIDS can be transmitted by sharing meals, (53%) stated that it can be spread by mosquito bite and (51.24%) were of the opinion that AIDS can spread by using same toilet. Misconceptions of HIV spread by sharing meals and toilet use were significantly associated with educational status.

When asked about use of condom for preventing transmission of HIV, (68.1%) truck drivers who have studied less than 6th class, (86.8%) educated between 6th and 10th class and (83.9%) who had studied beyond 10th class agreed that use

of condoms does prevent spread of AIDS. Difference between three groups was statistically highly significant. ($p<0.005$) Sexual behavior of Truck drivers: (16%) of the drivers had never experienced sexual intercourse. (25.79%) said that they had only one sexual partner, (13%) had 2- 5 sexual partners and (45.23%) had more than 5 sexual partners in their lifetime. 30% of truck drivers in the age group of 20 years and below, (56.75%) in 21 - 30 years' age group and (64.7%) in the age group > 30 years gave history of exposure to CSW. Overall (57.24%) of truck drivers had exposure to CSWs anytime during their life time. Of these 100 truck drivers, (66. %) were married and 44 were unmarried. There was no significant association between marital status and exposure to CSWs ($p > 0.05$). On analyzing the data according to educational status of 100 truck drivers who had exposure to CSWs, (22.8%) had studied less than class 6, while (14.2%) had studied more than class 10th. On analysis there was no significant association between educational status and exposure to CSWs. Out of (57.24%) truck drivers who gave history of CSW exposure only (6.79%) had used condom every time they visited CSW while (60.49%) drivers had never used condoms while visiting CSW. These 11 cases who always used a condom (63.6%) had studied more than class 10 and (27.8%) had studied between class 6th and 10th. Of the 98 cases who had never used a condom (24.5%) significantly associated with condom use among truck drivers. Only 18% were aware about STIs and 82% had not heard of any disease, other than AIDS, which can be transmitted by sexual route. Of the 51 who were aware about STIs 82.4% gave history of exposure to CSW as compared to only 51.2% out of 100 truck drivers who were not aware of other STIs. On analysis data the association was found to be highly significant. On analysis of condom usage with awareness of STIs among 51.2% who had exposure to CSWs the association was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

5. Conclusion

The overall knowledge about the modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS was generally good. Almost all of the truck drivers were aware about the transmission of HIV by heterosexual route. But the knowledge about other modes of transmission that is from pregnant mother to her unborn fetus through breastfeeding and through a homosexual route was inadequate. This could be due to the fact that the main thrust of HIV/AIDS

education of truck drivers is limited to bring about change in their high-risk behavior, that is unsafe sex with commercial sex workers and rightly so, of the respondents are aware that condom use during sex with commercial sex workers could prevent AIDS. Misconceptions as regards to transmission of HIV/AIDS by sharing needles mosquito bite and using public toilet were present among truck drivers. These misconceptions can lead to increased discrimination against patients of HIV/AIDS.

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