



Sexual Behaviour Among Truck Drivers Halting At Kalamboli Truck Terminal, Navi Mumbai

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RESEARCH

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Abstract

Background

Many Indian truck drivers tend to have multiple sexual partners, owing to the migratory nature of their occupation. Consequently there is a greater risk for them to pass on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV to their wives and other partners. This study endeavours to document the sexual behaviour and trends of condom usage, of truck drivers halting at Kalamboli Truck Terminal, Navi Mumbai.

Method

This community based, cross sectional study was conducted by interviewing 300 male truck drivers using a pre-tested structured questionnaire. Data collected was compiled and analysed using Mean and Percentages.

Results

Of the 300 truck drivers interviewed, mean age of first sexual encounter was 19.4 years. 270 truck drivers had experienced sexual intercourse and 30 had not. Out of 270 sexually exposed truck drivers, 40.7% had sex with commercial sex workers (CSWs) only, 1.1% with other men only, 0.7% with Transsexuals only and 7.5% with other known females. 5.9% had sex with multiple

categories. Premarital sex was reported in 70.25% truck drivers and 28.4% married truck drivers had extramarital sex. Of the Truck drivers having sex outside marriage, 53% used condoms regularly. Of the 47% truck drivers who reported irregular / no use of condoms, the main reasons given were "Did not like to use as it affects sexual pleasure" (40.8%) and "Could not procure at spur of the moment" (36.7%).

Conclusion

Owing to the migratory nature of their occupation and high risk sexual behaviour, truck drivers form a high risk group for contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS and other STIs. Thus there is an urgent need for intensifying effective strategies to educate truck drivers and to change their perceptions regarding safe sex.

Key Words

Truck Drivers, Sexual Behaviour, Condom usage, Kalamboli Truck Terminal.

Background

HIV / AIDS has emerged as one of the major public health problems in India. The Indian National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) estimates that 2.31 million people in India were living with HIV in 2007 (1). The number of AIDS cases in India as of 31st July, 2005 were 1, 11,608 and that in Maharashtra were 13,747 (2). The average HIV prevalence among women attending antenatal clinics in India is 0.88%. Much higher rates are found amongst people attending STI clinics (5.66%), female sex workers (8.44%), injecting drug users (10.16%) and men who have sex with men (8.74%) (1). Thus the disease is widely prevalent in India.

The role of mobile populations in the spread of HIV has been documented in several countries worldwide. Truck drivers & sex workers constitute a major high risk group for HIV / AIDS. A study on the



HIV sero prevalence among truck drivers in the state of Tamil Nadu showed that 3% of truck drivers were infected in 1994, which increased to 9% in 1997, i.e. a threefold increase in 3 years (3).

Due to the migratory nature of their occupation, truck drivers tend to have multiple sexual partners. Truckers then pass on the infection to their wives and other commercial sex workers they meet on their journey. Commercial sex and substance abuse are firmly entrenched in the socio-cultural milieu of the trucking industry in India and is a part of their daily life. The drivers spend a substantial part of their earnings on these habits (4).

Many truck drivers hesitate to admit having had contact with sex workers. Most are unwilling to use condoms. Many don't know where condoms are available and how they protect them from HIV. The truck drivers rarely visit hospitals and instead seek the help of quacks and home remedies to cure STIs. Many lack information about STIs and HIV/AIDS and their prevention, thus emphasizing the need for HIV prevention activities. In its National AIDS Control Program – II, NACO is giving the highest priority to an effective and sustained strategy to bring about changes in behaviour to prevent further infection (5). The high HIV prevalence and low condom use among truck drivers and sex workers, as well as the complex web of travel and sexual mixing, create a milieu that is conducive to the spread of HIV and other STIs.

With this background, this study endeavoured to document the sexual behaviour of truck drivers halting at the Kalamboli Truck Terminal, Navi Mumbai. This would help in determining the extent of this problem in this part of the country and help in formulating effective strategies towards tackling this menace. Since the truck stops are easy to identify, targeted interventions at these places could have a dramatic effect.

Method

A cross – sectional study was conducted in June and July 2006 on Truck Drivers halting at Kalamboli Truck Terminal, Navi Mumbai (study area). The Kalamboli Truck Terminal was established considering the need of providing truck parking facility, transit and transshipment of goods, of trucks coming into the city of Mumbai by local administrative authorities. Situated 45 km from Mumbai, the terminal adjoins the Panvel bypass connecting the Mumbai – Pune Expressway and is directly connected to NH4. Besides parking lot facilities, the truck terminal houses all the relevant activities related to transport, and provides various facilities like transit go-downs, a petrol pump-cum-

service station, petrol pumps, garages and spare parts shops, lodging complex plots, weigh bridges, dhaabas (local diners), common toilets and bathrooms and washing ramps (6).

Approximately 750 – 800 truck drivers while passing through Kalamboli Truck Terminal, halt here over a period of 2 months. Since the study was planned to be conducted in 2 months time, as such 300 truck drivers were considered as adequate sample size for the study. For the purpose of data collection, a questionnaire was prepared and validated with a pilot study with 40 truck drivers. 300 male truck drivers were approached and personally interviewed, after explaining the objectives of the study and taking their consent in the language they understood (in either English or Hindi). The data collected on a day to day basis was compiled, tabulated and analysed. Statistical analysis was done using Mean and Percentages.

Results

Of the 300 truck drivers interviewed, mean age of first sexual encounter was 19.4 years. 270 (90%) truck drivers interviewed had experienced sexual intercourse and 30 (10%) had never had sex. 228 (76%) were married and 72 (24%) were unmarried. Of all the unmarried truck drivers, 42 (58.3%) had experienced sexual intercourse whereas 30 (41.7%) had never experienced sexual intercourse. Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of the partners of sexually exposed truck drivers



Table 1. Partners of Sexually Exposed Truck Drivers

SR. NO	SEXUAL EXPOSURE	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	TOTAL
		% (n = 228)	% (n = 42)	% (n = 270)
a.	Spouse only	52.2	-	44.1
b.	CSW only	36.4	64.3	40.7
c.	Other men only	0	7.1	1.1
d.	Transsexuals only	0.8	0	0.7
e.	Other Known Female only	5.3	19.1	7.5
f.	Multiple Categories	5.3	9.5	5.9

Outside the marriage bond, 58.8% married truck drivers had pre-marital sex, 28.4% had extra-marital sex, and 12.8% had pre-marital as well as extra-marital sex.

Of the Truck drivers having sex outside marriage 53% used condoms on all the occasions that they had participated in sexual intercourse, whereas 47% did not use condoms regularly. Table 2 lists the reasons given for irregular use of condoms.

Table 2

Reasons given by truck drivers for irregular use of condoms outside marriage bond

SR No.	REASON	PERCENTAGE
1	Does not like to use	40.8
2	Difficulty in procurement	16.9
3	Shy / Embarrassed to buy	2.8
4	Doesn't think it offers protection	2.8
5	Spur of Moment	36.7

Discussion

An analysis of the results of the study helps to shed some light on the scenario regarding the sexual behaviour of truck drivers in western India. As seen in Table 1, out of 270 sexually active truck drivers, 40.7% had experienced sex with commercial sex workers (CSWs) only, 1.1% with other men only, 0.7% with transsexuals only, 7.5% with other known females only and 5.9% had sex with multiple categories. Chaturvedi S et al (2006) (7) in their study among truck drivers passing through Pune – Ahmednagar highway, a major transport route, reported that 57.24% truck drivers had exposure to commercial sex workers. This comparison highlights the high prevalence of commercial sexual activity in the region, which could contribute to the rapid spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. In the present study, out of 228 married truck drivers, 52.2% had sex only with their spouse whereas 36.4% had sex with only CSWs. Table 1 also shows that out of the 42 unmarried truck drivers with sexual experience, 64.3% had participated in sexual intercourse with only CSWs and 9.5% had sex with multiple categories. This trend is present elsewhere in the developing world as well. A study of Thai long haul truck drivers found that 86% of the single men and 63% of the married men had had commercial sex (8). Frequent travelling and a long absence from home make the truck drivers particularly vulnerable to engage in casual sex and the apparently abundant presence of CSWs at various truck stops provided the opportunity.

The present study showed that most truck drivers engaged in premarital and extra marital sex. Amongst all married truck drivers who had experienced sexual intercourse outside the marriage bond, 58.8% had premarital sex, 28.4% had extramarital sex and 12.8% had both premarital and extramarital sex. A study conducted by Bansal R.K (4) among truck drivers in Indore (M.P), reported that 82.9% and 43.8% of the senior and junior drivers respectively, had a history of extramarital sex. It is thus imperative that programs designed to educate truck drivers take into account the existence of extramarital and premarital sexual relations and stress on the use of condoms as preventive measures against the spread of sexually transmitted infections in the population.

In the present study, out of all truck drivers who had sex outside the marriage bond, 53% used condoms on every occasion. Many used condoms



regularly with CSWs on their insistence, however 47% did not use/irregularly used condoms while having sex. Ramjee and Gouws (12) in their study reported that 29% truck drivers interviewed never used condoms with sex workers. A study conducted by Rao K, Pilli R.D et al (8) among truck drivers along the Andhra-Orissa border in eastern India, showed that 87% of subjects were sexually promiscuous with only 11% using condoms during commercial sex. Thus in most tested groups, condom usage is low and thus this is an area where effecting increase in condom usage will possibly yield reductions in the rates of transfer of STIs and HIV/AIDS.

Table 2 shows that the main reasons reported for not using / irregularly using condoms outside marriage bond were: "Did not like to use" as it affects sexual pleasure (40.8%), "Did not use at the spur of the moment" (36.7%), "Difficulty in procurement" (16.9%), "Felt shy to buy" (2.8%) etc. A decrease in sexual sensations and pleasure is noted to be the most common reason given for low condom use, a problem that can be helped by providing thinner condoms that maintain adequate sensations during intercourse. Furthermore, measures to increase condom availability such as condom vending machines, a better distribution network and free distribution of condoms made from thinner latex will help achieve a greater penetration of condom usage. Finally, education to help remove taboos associated with sex will reduce the shyness associated with condom purchase.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the high risk behaviour with respect to the spread of STIs and HIV/AIDS in the study population. Due to the migratory nature of their occupation, long absence from their families, multiple sexual partners and low condom use, truck drivers form a high risk group for contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS. There is an urgent need for intensifying effective strategies to educate truck drivers to change their high risk sexual behaviour or at least to adopt safer sexual practices. Factors that cause low condom use need to be addressed, as condoms remain some of the easiest and most cost effective methods to combat the spread of this disease. Since participation in commercial sex remains high, methods to educate commercial sex workers so that they insist on condom use for every encounter will do a great deal to promote safer sexual behaviour. More outreach programmes, which take into account the problems faced by commercial sex workers, such as violence and trafficking, are needed to empower the women and thus reduce their chances of contracting these diseases. Ultimately, a multipronged approach with increased counselling facilities, strengthened HIV

surveillance protocols and targeted interventions aimed at truck drivers will be needed to effectively reduce high risk behaviour in this population and decrease the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.