

AIDS: A Socio-Behavioural Study on Truckers with Sex Workers

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Abstract: AIDS is a major public health concern today in India. AIDS does not discriminate between classes, castes or communities. It is caused by HIV, which is transmitted mainly through sexual intercourse. India has one of the largest road networks in the world, involving millions of drivers and helpers. This study has been undertaken to understand the burning issues of AIDS from the perspectives of relationship of truckers and commercial sex workers. The study has tried to connect the micro-level reality of AIDS with the issues of sexual behaviours of truckers with sex workers from the perspective of socio-behavioral conditionality of truckers. The methodology of the study was based on the primary data collected through direct interviews with truckers by using an interview schedule with structured questionnaire. The study revealed the sexual behavioural patterns of the truckers with the commercial sex workers (CSWs) who generally transmit STDs/HIV/AIDS. The rising trends in HIV infection in India have already stirred socio-cultural and ethical issues. The most serious impact of AIDS epidemic will be on economic development.

Keywords: AIDS, Truckers, Commercial Sex Workers (CSW), Sexual behaviour pattern, Knowledge of STD.

INTRODUCTION

India has one of the largest road networks in the world, involving millions of drivers and helpers. Truck drivers spend long periods away from home, and it is common practice for them to have relations with sex workers while on the road. A 2008 study showed that nearly a third of the long-distance truckers had paid for sex in the past twelve months [1]. "There is no entertainment. It is day-in-day-out driving. When they stop, they drink, dine and have sex with women. Then they transfer HIV from urban to rural settings" [2]. Sometimes, relations with sex workers occur at roadside 'dhabas', which act as both brothels and hotels for truck drivers. In other cases, drivers stop to pick up women by the side of the road, and transport them to another area after they have had sex with them. Both truck drivers and sex workers move from area to area, often unaware that they are infected with HIV, causing Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

There have been a number of major HIV/STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) prevention projects, aimed at truckers, many of which have aimed to promote use of condom. Some of these projects include not just truckers, but also other stakeholders such as gas station owners and employees. A specific example from Mumbai is the AIDS Workplace. Awareness campaign, which is mandatory and which targets the drivers at the

regional transport authority, where the drivers get their licenses renewed annually. As part of the third phase of the National AIDS control programme (2007-2013), 60 truckers' interventions have been set up at major trans-shipment locations tasked with providing behavioural change-education, condom and STI services to truckers. Gradually, these interventions reach about 1.4 million out of an estimated 3 million truck drivers [3]. Other campaigns have targeted the wives and partners of truck drivers, who often become infected when their partner returns home after a long absence. The HIV epidemic is found to be the highest among women whose spouses work in the transport industry [4]. Yet as the testimony of one woman in Vijayavada demonstrates, these campaigns do not always manage to reach those at risk: "My husband is a truck driver and I got HIV through him. I had never heard of HIV or condoms before that and because I can't read, I couldn't understand any of the posters or banners" [5]. There are signs that some efforts to prevent HIV among truck drivers have been successful. For example, a recent survey of truck drivers in Tamil Nadu – carried out after an HIV prevention program - found that the proportion of drivers who reported engaging in commercial sex declined from 14 percent in 1996 to 2 percent in 2003. Of those who did report having commercial sex, the proportion that had not used a condom the last time they did so fell from 45 percent to 9 percent [6].

The present study has attempted to understand the burning issues of AIDS from the perspectives of relationship of truckers and commercial sex workers. The study has tried to connect the micro-level reality of AIDS with the issues of sexual behaviours of truckers with sex workers from the perspective of socio-behavioral conditionality of truckers. It is an intensive micro-level field study of truckers, which is exploratory as well as descriptive in nature. In this study, the researchers have tried to find out the sexual behavioural patterns of the truckers with the commercial sex workers (CSWs) who generally transmit STDs/HIV/AIDS.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Health is Wealth”- this popular proverb is accepted by all societies. Health is a major issue and is concerned as a vital matter irrespective of countries’ development. In fact, all communities have their own concept about health as part of their culture. “Health is a stage of complete physical, mental, and socially well being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity” [7]. Sexual Health is a social, economic and political issue and is a part of fundamental human right. Inequality, poverty, exploitation, violence and injustice are the routes of ill health and sometimes these lead to the death of poor and marginalized people. HIV/AIDS is an unprecedented epidemic and public health emergency. According to recent estimate, around the world, over 33 million people are infected with HIV, and over 16 million have died of AIDS related illness. It is estimated that up to 90 percent of HIV positive people in low-income countries do not know their HIV status [8]. HIV is a virus that causes AIDS, a fatal condition for which there is no known cause. India has the largest number of HIV positive people and more than 3.5 million people are affected by this virus in India today [9].

Truckers are seven times more at risk of being infected, because they are engaged in high-risk sexual behaviour, as they have to stay away from their homes over long periods of time. It is estimated that 7 out of every 100 truckers are already affected by HIV positive [10]. ‘HIV/AIDS primarily affects the truckers and their families. If adequate steps are not taken to deal with the problem effectively, it could affect the entire business world. The physical as well as moral of the workers would be affected if they were unwell. Fewer people will want to join the work force because of the stigmatization associated with the industry. HIV positive infected person has developed a prone to secondary infection. His consistent health problems may cost the company time and money. Smaller trucking companies will be hit much harder than large ones when the transport industry is affected; it affects the economy of the entire country [11].

The rising trends in HIV infection in India have already stirred socio-cultural and ethical issues. So, now we need to generate a movement to stem the rapidly spreading epidemic of HIV/AIDS and its multifaceted complexity. It cannot be the task of health system alone but the professionals from all concerned disciplines and walks of life need to rise to the occasion and join the forces only [12]. Then we can hope to prevail against the AIDS pandemic. We shall overcome because these steps are not difficult to implement.

The social issues associated with AIDS can be understood in two ways. Firstly, they may refer to the social determinants of the pandemic. Secondly, they relate to the social impact of the pandemic. Ethical questions present some of the most vexing problems associated with HIV infection [13]. Ethics cannot be considered in a vacuum. The social context dictates how the principles of ethics are applied and interpreted. Spread of HIV is linked to certain patterns of human behaviour. Hence, it has both biological and socio-cultural determinants. Any attempt to control its spreading up must take into account the complex social, cultural, economic and environmental factors in which the disease is embedded.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the study have been as follows:

- To find out the sexual behaviours of the truckers in relation with the commercial sex workers (CSWs).
- To find out the habits and ways of living of the truckers.
- To find out the truckers’ knowledge about STDs/HIV/AIDS.
- To find out the truckers’ opinion for prevention of STDs/HIV/AIDS.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Petrapole, which lies on the India-Bangladesh border on the NH-35 in the Bongaon subdivision area of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, which is the busiest and the largest land port in South and South East Asia. It is a border crossing with Bangladesh and an important trading route between the two countries of India and Bangladesh.

400 truckers were selected from this area. As truckers are the floating people from different states of India, so a specific list of the truckers were not available. So, a time schedule was framed according to the availability of truckers, which were considered for the study. Data were collected through direct interview method. A structured schedule consisting of different close and open-ended questions were framed for collecting the relevant information in relation to the

problems of the truckers. The researcher has mainly followed the interview method and observation for this study. Data collection was started from July 2010 and ended in September 2010.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Sexuality is, in its broadest sense, a psychological energy that finds physical and emotional expressions in the desire for contact, warmth, tenderness and often love. Sexuality is a part of a person, which cannot be removed and looked at separately from all other parts.

Sexuality also includes genital and reproductive processes such as intercourse and childbearing. However, it is much more than this. Human sexuality includes desires, feelings, acts, values and attitudes. It involves (a) biological aspects, (b) psychological aspects and (c) social aspects.

Human sexuality is a function of our whole personality that begins at birth and ends in death. It includes:

- How you feel about yourself as a person
- How you feel about being a woman or a man and
- How you get along with members of the same sex and the opposite sex.

The scope of normal sexuality is very broad and includes relationship, affection, intimacy, body image, touch, feelings, caring, sharing, personality, identity, emotions, thoughts and actions. Having a sexual dimension to our personality is normal. There are innumerable ways of being sexual forms looking at each other, talking together, sharing work, holding hands, kissing etc.

To break the monotony, frustration and loneliness of the road, many truck drivers in India

establish casual relationships with commercial sex workers (CSWs) in different truck stops and villages along their routes. Sadly, it is estimated that more than three hundred thousand truckers in India are infected with AIDS and other STDs.

The Table 1 illustrates that the majority of the truckers have their understanding regarding sex. Five states of the sample truckers have different types of idea on sex such as entertainment, love, reproduction, sexual act and enjoyment as well as pleasure. 46.25% of the truckers have their understanding on sex, which means sexual act. Moreover, out of five states of the truckers, 17.75% truckers have no idea regarding sex and 16.50% truckers have their understanding on sex as entertainment.

Sexual behaviour of the truckers with the sex workers is multi-dimensional. Most of the truckers practice sex with commercial sex workers by paying money. Condom use is also inconsistent due to alcoholism and lack of knowledge. Some truckers practice sex without condom due to their low level of enjoyment, time factor, money factor etc. In this study, it is evident that 97% truckers visit to commercial sex workers (CSWs).

In surveying 400 truckers of five states, 97.00% of them usually go to commercial sex workers and 3.00% of them abstain from visiting to commercial sex workers. The Table 2 shows a detailed state-wise distribution of the truckers' sexual behaviour. For West Bengal, out of 163 truckers, 96.32% of them usually go to commercial sex workers. For Bihar, 98.73% of them usually go to commercial sex workers. The truckers of the states of Haryana, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh also show the same trend of visiting commercial sex partners' places. Out of these states, Bihar shows the maximum percentages of truckers (98.73%) who go to sex workers frequently.

Table 1: Truckers' understanding about sex

State	No of Truckers	Entertainment	Love	Reproduction	Sexual Act	Enjoy and pleasure	Don't know
West Bengal	163	45 (27.60)	2 (1.22)	9 (5.52)	62 (38.03)	9 (5.52)	36 (22.08)
Bihar	157	11 (7.00)	3 (1.91)	53 (3.18)	76 (48.40)	39 (24.84)	23 (14.64)
Haryana	29	4 (13.79)	1 (3.44)	0	18 (62.06)	1 (3.44)	5 (17.24)
Punjab	11	0	0	0	5 (45.45)	2 (18.18)	4 (36.36)
Andhra Pradesh	40	6 (15.00)	0	5 (12.50)	24 (60.00)	2 (5.00)	3 (7.50)
Total	400 (100)	66 (15.50)	6 (1.50)	19 (4.75)	185 (46.25)	53 (13.25)	71 (17.75)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Table 2: Frequency of interaction with Sex Workers (last 12 months)

Sl. No.	State	No. of Truckers	Yes	No
1.	West Bengal	163	157 (96.32)	6 (3.68)
2.	Bihar	157	155 (98.73)	2 (1.27)
3.	Haryana	29	27 (93.10)	2 (6.90)
4.	Punjab	11	10 (90.91)	1 (9.09)
5.	Andhra Pradesh	40	39 (97.50)	1 (2.50)
Total		400 (100)	388 (97.00)	12 (3.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Table 3 shows that out of total 400 respondents from five states, 43.25% respondents use condom while 53.75% do not use condom with their sexual partners. The majority numbers of respondents using condoms have come from West Bengal (53.98%) and the

respondents never using condoms have come from Haryana (75.86%). The majority of respondents who never interacted with sex-workers are from Punjab (9.09%) and the minimum respondents for the same are from Bihar (1.27%).

Table 3: Use of condom by Truckers

Sl. No.	State	No. of Truckers	Yes	No	Never Interacted with Sex Workers
1.	West Bengal	163	88 (53.98)	69 (42.33)	6 (3.68)
2.	Bihar	157	63 (40.12)	92 (58.59)	2 (1.27)
3.	Haryana	29	5 (17.24)	22 (75.86)	2 (6.89)
4.	Punjab	11	4 (36.36)	6 (54.54)	1 (9.09)
5.	Andhra Pradesh	40	13 (32.50)	26 (65.00)	1 (2.5)
Total		400 (100)	173 (43.25)	215 (53.75)	12 (3.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Peno-vaginal sex is normal sexual intercourse where the penis of the man is inserted into the vagina of the woman. This is done in various sex positions. It has been shown from the Table-4 that the majority (95.25%) of the truckers in all states has knowledge

about peno-vaginal sex and only 4.75% truckers have no knowledge about the same. Among these five states, the truck drivers of West Bengal (97.55%), Bihar (97.45%) and Andhra Pradesh (92.50%) have good knowledge about it.

Table 4: Knowledge about Peno-vaginal Sex

Sl. No.	State	No. of Truckers	Yes	No
1.	West Bengal	163	159 (97.55)	4 (2.45)
2.	Bihar	157	153 (97.45)	4 (2.55)
3.	Haryana	29	23 (79.31)	6 (20.69)
4.	Punjab	11	9 (81.82)	2 (18.18)
5.	Andhra Pradesh	40	37 (92.50)	3 (7.50)
Total		400 (100)	381 (95.25)	19 (4.75)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Peno-rectal means sexual activity involving the bottom- in particular, the type of intercourse in which the penis goes into the anus. It is often referred to as 'rectal sex'. The Table- 5 also depicts that the majority (89.00%) of the truckers in all states have knowledge about peno-rectal sex and only 11.00% truckers have no knowledge about this matter. Among these five states, the truck drivers of Andhra Pradesh (95.00%) and West Bengal (91.41%) have good knowledge about peno-rectal sex.

Peno-oral sex is when a man stimulates of their partner's genitals with his or her mouth, lips or tongue.

This could involve sucking or licking their penis (also called fellatio), vagina and clitoris (cunnilingus) or anus (anilingus). Many people have oral sex before or instead of sexual intercourse. The Table-6 shows that the majority (66.50%) of the truckers in all states has no knowledge about peno-oral sex and only 33.50% truckers have knowledge about the peno-oral sex. Among these five states, the truck drivers of Andhra Pradesh (60.00%) have good knowledge about peno-oral sex. In addition, a majority of 79.75% truckers of West Bengal has no knowledge regarding this matter.

Table 5: Knowledge about Peno-rectal Sex

State	No. of Respondent	Yes	No
West Bengal	163	149 (91.41)	14 (8.59)
Bihar	157	137 (87.26)	20 (12.74)
Haryana	29	24 (82.76)	5 (17.24)
Punjab	11	8 (72.73)	3 (27.27)
Andhra Pradesh	40	38 (95.00)	2 (5.00)
Total	400 (100)	356 (89.00)	44 (11.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

STDs comprise more than 30 different diseases and are caused by different organisms as viruses, bacteria, fungus etc. STDs are communicable diseases. They spread mainly through sexual contact of the micro-organisms, which are transmitted only when there is close body contact between two individuals by body fluids or sex organs. The age group of 15-45 years

(reproductive age group) is at risk for any STD including HIV. In women the STDs are mostly symptom less and hidden. Women and newborn children have the most severe complications of STDs. STDs are widely prevalent in both rural and urban population.

Table 6: Knowledge about Peno-oral Sex

State	No. of Truckers	Yes	No
West Bengal	163	33 (20.25)	130 (79.75)
Bihar	157	62 (39.49)	95 (60.51)
Haryana	29	11 (37.93)	18 (62.07)
Punjab	11	4 (36.36)	7 (63.64)
Andhra Pradesh	40	24 (60.00)	16 (40.00)
Total	400 (100)	134 (33.50)	266 (66.50)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

STDs are diagnosed using syndromic approach. Most STDs produce common symptoms like ulcer, discharge etc. In the syndromic classification, e.g. ulcer producing STDs are grouped together and recognized as genital ulcer syndrome. The causative organisms responsible for the genital ulcer syndromes are many and various treatments are given syndromically to control the causative organisms. By this method, there is no need for elaborate clinical back up and the patient is diagnosed on syndrome and is advised for treatment from the first day of visit to the doctor's clinic.

Awareness of STD is very important for the truckers as well as the members of the general society for prevention of HIV. Table 7 shows that out of 400 respondents, 69.00% respondents responded that they have knowledge about STDs and 31.00% respondents responded that they have no adequate knowledge about it. Therefore, this is alarming. The truckers are also the

vulnerable section of the community due to their movement from place to place. Many of them belong to poor socio-economic condition and have to maintain reckless lives. Most of the time they have to live outside their homes. As a result, the sexual relationships with the multiple sex partners in their traffic ways are the common mechanism to satisfy their sex in general. So, the lack of knowledge on STDs, HIV and AIDS due to their sexual interactions is really a major alarming problem of our present society.

The Table 7 depicts that out of 400 truckers, 69.00% of them have knowledge on Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) which have been transmitting from one person to another. On the other hand, the study shows that 31.00% do not have any knowledge about it. The truckers of all sample states reveal the same type of awareness. No special distinct category of opinion is observed in this study.

Table 7: Knowledge about STDs

State	No. of Truckers	Yes	No
West Bengal	163	121 (74.23)	42 (25.77)
Bihar	157	105 (66.88)	52 (33.12)
Haryana	29	17 (58.62)	12 (41.38)
Punjab	11	7 (63.64)	4 (36.36)
Andhra Pradesh	40	26 (65.00)	14 (35.00)
Total	400 (100)	276 (69.00)	124 (31.00)

CONCLUSION

AIDS is a major public health concern today in India. All states are affected by it. AIDS does not discriminate between classes, castes or communities. It is caused by HIV, which is transmitted mainly through sexual intercourse. The virus can also be transmitted through contaminated blood and from mother to child. The disease cannot be cured. Preventive education is, therefore, the only means of preventing HIV/AIDS. India has one of the largest road networks in the world, where truckers carry freight. They spend away long stretches of time from their families that place them in close proximity to "high-risk" sexual networks. Their sexual behavior is driving the country to the threshold of an HIV/AIDS plague.

The rising trends in HIV infection in India have already stirred socio-cultural and ethical issues. The most serious impact of AIDS epidemic will be on economic development. AIDS primarily attacks men and women in their economically productive years when they provide the major labour force.

We need to generate a movement to stem the rapidly spreading epidemic of HIV/AIDS and its multifaceted complexity. It cannot be the task of health system alone, but the professionals from all concerned disciplines and walks of life need to rise to the occasion and join the forces. Only then, we can hope to prevail against the AIDS pandemic.

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