

Assessment of Profile and Level of Awareness about HIV/AIDS among Truck Drivers passing through a State Capital city of India.

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Abstract: Unsafe sex especially with multiple extra marital partners is the prime mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS in the developing countries. Migrant population such as long distance truck drivers, are very prone to this habit therefore are most potential to develop and spread of disease. The study of this group was conducted with an objective to assess the profile and the level of awareness about HIV/AIDS among the truck drivers so as to use the same in prevention of disease in the community and improving the public health. A sample of 600 truck drivers passing through the highway connecting the Lucknow city (India) was drawn during April – May 2013 and observations were made with the help of pre-designed, pretext questionnaire and personal interview. The study revealed that the truck drivers are in mean age group of 31.8 years which is a sexually & economically age group. 87.67% are married. Only 8.16% are aware about HIV/AIDS. 78% truck drivers do not use condom while having sex with spouse or during extra marital intercourse. These findings are of great concern for preventing the spread of diseases and epidemiological study of HIV/AIDS. **Recommendation** - One of the recommendations is to establish the awareness development camp & voluntary counselling centres in the highways for the truck drivers as the social vaccine is the best. In addition to this mass awareness campaign to be strengthened. **Key words:** HIV/AIDS, Truck drivers, migrant population, Awareness and prevention, Extramarital affairs.

INTRODUCTION

In India, early cases of HIV/AIDS were restricted primarily to Chennai and Mumbai. The disease soon spread to other parts of the country, often following path of major highways and labour migrants. At present more than 6.50 million people in India are infected with HIV and more than 1.2 lac full bloom cases of AIDS have been detected¹. With a prevalence of 0.8%, it is expected that the disease will multiply very soon if not controlled at the earliest. The unsafe sex is the major mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS. It gave an insight that mobile and migrant population is associated with the prevalence of the HIV/AIDS. Majority of the truck drivers enjoy unsafe sex. In a study among the long distance truck drivers in Nigeria, a major group that transmits HIV, the use of male latex condom is generally low and erratic. The drivers noted that their major barriers experienced were that condoms reduced their sexual satisfaction, caused health problems to them and hindered their sexual interest². Some of the drivers are knowledgeable about AIDS and prevention measures, with some important misconceptions, but self assessment of risk of HIV showed a negligible sense of their personal vulnerability in long distance truck drivers in Thailand³. Sex has been reported for the truck drivers as a source of infection and a need of life. In a study conducted in South Africa 66% of men reported having sexually transmitted infection in the previous six month, 37% always stopped for sex along the route⁴. It is generally accepted and documented that long distance truck drivers have been remained one of the major resources in the spread of HIV/AIDS pandemic, due to sharing the sex with multiple partners. Truck drivers could play an important role in the spread of the infection in rural India also. In a study in India 80% drivers admitted having multiple heterosexual partners including prostitutes¹. Majority of truck drivers belong to low socio economic status and are unaware about the possible diseases, are habitual of unsafe sex due unaffordable cost or unavailability of condom. Hence, it is essential to study the level of awareness about HIV/AIDS and related issues among the truck drivers.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

All the six major highways connecting Lucknow city (India) were covered. A sample of 600 truck drivers was drawn, 100 truckers from each highway. Observations were made on a pre-designed and pre-tested pro-forma. The period of study was between 25 April 2013 to 20 May 2013 and time of interview with the truck drivers was selected specially during the period 2.00 pm. to 4.00 pm. This is the time when truck drivers take meal and rest in Dhabas (small restaurants). Therefore they could be easily found for getting responses through interactions.

RESULTS

The mean age of truck drivers was 31.83 years. The maximum number of truck drivers were in the age group of 25- 34 years. 87.67% were married and 69% were from urban background. Maximum level of awareness (8.16%) was among 35- 44 years age group. Regarding source of information, maximum (28%) through co-workers,

followed by Radio (23%), transport companies (20%), T.V. (11%), others (8%), health workers (6%), print media (4%). So far as safe sex is concerned, 78% do not use condom during intercourse with spouse or during extramarital intercourse. 25% truck drivers found it difficult to avail free condom. 92% showed their willingness to have knowledge about HIV/AIDS now.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the truck drivers are in the potential age group (mean age group 31.8 yrs), which is sexually and economically productive age group. They are mobile and have an access to wide geographical area. Only fraction of the truck drivers have the awareness (8.16%) about the disease and its mode of spread. Co-workers (28%), Radio (23%) and transport company (20%) are the major source of information. The low awareness level, non-availability of free condom and intercourse without condom (78%) are the factors of great concern regarding epidemiology of HIV/AIDS. The low level of awareness (8.16%) about the disease, its spread along with not using condom during intercourse with wife or others are the main factors to be taken into consideration while framing the strategy for prevention of HIV/AIDS. Study on sexual behavior, history of STD, condom use and circumstances under which the condom were used, was conducted in Harare which facilitated to improve the condition. Men using a condom more than once were younger and had more education⁵. Thus the best vaccine is the social vaccine. The social vaccine involves spreading education on how to protect yourself, hundred percent condom use and changing sexual behavior. In fact the social vaccine was so successful in Thailand that the infection rate has come down by 50%⁶.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the recommendations is to establish awareness development centres along with Voluntary counselling in the highways, and to support the transport companies in participation of I.E.C. programme. It is pertinent to mention here that the role of mass media in awareness development programme is immense, therefore same to be applied here. Due to dynamic (not static) in nature, the truck drivers have hardly any time to watch the TV but always they keep on listening the radio during the driving or the rest. They also go through the Hindi newspaper while on rest. Therefore more and more emphasis to be given on radio/news paper awareness programme. The study also shows that the main source of information was co-worker. Therefore the awareness through radio/news paper to a truck driver will further help by disseminating the information to other truck driver during the period they meet especially while they are at rest and together during day or night.

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