

SEXUAL PROFILE OF TRUCKERS IN SURAT DISTRICTUpadhyay Ashutosh¹, Pawar AB², Bansal RK³¹Tutor, ²Associate Professor, ³Professor and Head, Dept. of Community Medicine, Surat Municipal Institute of Medical Education & Research, Umarwada, Surat-395010, Gujarat.**Correspondence:** dr_ashu30@yahoo.com**ABSTRACT**

This cross sectional study among 200 truck drivers in Surat city reveals that premarital and extramarital sex, often unprotected, is entrenched in their milieu. Furthermore they have multiple sexual partners and therefore this group is at a high risk of contracting and transmitting STIs and HIV and need urgent attention.

Key words: Truck drivers, sexual profile, Surat

INTRODUCTION

Transportation plays crucial role in economic development and trucks are a major means of transporting of industrial, agricultural and household products from one place to another in India. Long distance truck crew are often away for long periods from home and are rarely able to visit their home as trucks owners are unwilling to leave their trucks idle in their absence and take can on a new driver, if their driver asks for leave. Consequently, these drivers indulge on pre-marital and extramarital sexual encounters on the highway, commonly with commercial sex workers (CSW) and often indulge in unsafe sex.¹⁻⁴ HIV/AIDS awareness and condom use has been found to be poor among them^{3,5-6}. Many of them become victims of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. NACP III, in 2006 has stated that truck drivers are a critical group because of their 'mobility with HIV' and inadequate access to treatment for sexually transmitted infections aggravates their risk of contracting and transmitting the virus and thus they play an important role in the spread of the infection in community i.e. bridge population.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This cross sectional study interviews 200 truck drivers, with their informed consent, using a pre-tested and largely open ended questionnaire so as to elicit information on important sexual variables with context to their risk of contraction and transmission of STIs, including HIV and AIDS in Surat city. The period of information collected was spread over 21 months period commencing from January 2008 up to September 2009 and all truck drivers that could be interviewed during this period have been included in the study. Subsequent to the interview process they were imparted health education on importance of safe sex, proper method of condom use, early signs, symptoms and treatment of various STIs from qualified doctors, HIV/AIDS, risks of having multiple sex partners, concept of bridge population, etc.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

21.5% truckers had reported of having a history of premarital relationship, studies have revealed that

premarital sexual relationship is significantly associated with lower educational attainments and the same was also brought out in the study. Our discussions revealed that extra marital relationship is quite an accepted norm in the milieu of these drivers and 14.5% had reported of having atleast one sexual partner on the highway. Further they had opined that it is still widely spreading amongst them and this sometimes leads to divorce or break up of their families. Studies have documented that extra marital relationships and unprotected sex lead to STIs including HIV/AIDS.

Most of the truck crew indulge in sexual encounters, commonly on the highway, in spite of being aware of the risks involved. Many of them had reported that they are a mobile group of the society and are away from their home for long periods of time and therefore their sexually promiscuous behaviour and STI profile, in line with other studies, Shreedhar (1995)⁷ had reported that India's long distance truck crew has on an average 200 sexual encounters per year and at any given time 70% of them have STDs, Baishalibal et. al. (2007)⁶ had reported that about 67% of the truck drivers visit sex workers.

Their partner profile reveals that 82.8%, 13.8% and 3.4% of the 29 truck drivers who had reported of having indulges in sex had 1-2, 3-4, > 5 sexual partners on their routine travel routes. Thus it can be safely inferred that truck drivers do indeed have multiple partners and are therefore vulnerable to contraction and transmission of STIs including HIV and AIDS as reported by others⁵ with alarming consequences. Studies elsewhere have also reported that premarital and extramarital sex is common among truck drivers, often with CSWs.

73.5% truck drivers had reported of being unaware of the fact that STIs are preventable. In our study, most of the truck crew had made an attempt to change themselves after they were imparted health training on the prevention of STIs and HIV/AIDS, however it was half hearted and usually not sustained. When asked to state their perceptions as to the impact of these trainings on their colleagues, they had reported that many of them either do not seriously attempt to

modify their behaviour after receiving health education or don't want to attend such trainings or do not take it seriously. Whatever the reason the fact that they do not seriously contemplate subsequent behavioural modification is amply clear and highlights the need for sustained IEC efforts in this regard.

NACO interventions are aimed at controlling the spread of HIV and STI through information about their transmission and prevention, aimed at promoting safe sex through use of condoms. They also facilitate easy access to condoms, treatment for STI, counseling and testing services. Our discussions revealed that few of the truck crew don't even bother to receive information about prevention of STIs facilities like condom promotion, syndromic approach etc. It needs mention that Syndromic management is a powerful tool in prevention and control of STI.

58.6% of them had reportedly engaged in extra-marital relationships as they are away from home for prolonged periods; 27.6% to ease the stress of daily routine; and 13.8% just for pass their time, commonly on the truck stations. During our study some of the truck drivers stated that mental tension and stress of various factors like family problems, social problems, financial deficit, unpleasant arguments with the truck owners, etc. 59.5% had reported of not using condoms while having sexual intercourse with their wives, as they believe in natural sex; where as 40.5% respondents reported using condoms during sex with wife. Various researchers have stated condom usage to range between a mere 3%⁸ upto 70%.⁹

In the context of condom usage with their spouse, 83.3% stated that they use condom for contraception; 14.1% use the condom for the protection of wife from HIV/AIDS, while 2.6% used condom for the first time to experience condom usage. Few condom users, having children of less age group stated that their condom use is completely on the basis of contraception. Further they stated that they have come across the advertisements regarding benefits of condom in fields of contraception and STIs prevention and, this why they use condoms. The observed condom usages are higher than that reported by others.¹⁰

While stating the reasons for non-usage of condoms, 35.3% do not use condom while sex with the wife as they believe in natural sex without any barrier, 30.3% said that condom interferes with sexual pleasure, 16.4% do not use condom as they are not interested in sex now because of approaching to old age, 14.8% do not use condom as they seem to be costly for them and they are not willing to use condoms in government supply. Barstad S (1993)¹¹ had also reported of scepticism among truck drivers towards condom use in Tanzania. There are multiple factors for non use of condoms among truck drivers,

particularly education, socio-economic status and their social milieu.

In our study, few of the truck drivers stated that they don't use condom at all as they don't feel any requirement of sexual encounters even with their wife, as the feeling of old age is created within them. In spite of not being in capable for sex, this feeling is generated by driving. According to a study by Bashkireva et. al. (2007)¹² Russia, premature ageing of physiologic parameters in automobile drivers is proved to be only "risk indicators", whereas prolonged length of service in driving is a real risk factor accelerating ageing process.

A worrisome observation was that 67.0% of the drivers did not possess a correct knowledge of condom use and furthermore they did not volunteer to acquire this knowledge even during our discussions. 69.3% truckers purchase condoms from shops, whereas the remaining 30.7% use Government supplied condoms. During 2008-09, condom use was promoted and condoms were provided at all ICTCs, ART Centres, and STI clinics. In the same year, 7.5 Lakh condoms were sold through 8500 condom vending machines. NACO has scaled up the female condom programme in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and West Bengal to saturate the entire female sex worker TIs. During 2008-09, 15 Lakh female condoms were procured. While concluding it would be safe to surmise that the sexual profile of truck drivers reveals that this group is at a high risk of contracting and transmitting STIs and HIV and needs urgent attention.

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