

Sexual Risk Behaviors and HIV/AIDS Awareness among Males in a Rural Community in Goa

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ABSTRACT

To study the heterosexual risk behaviors and to study the level of HIV/AIDS awareness among males in a rural community in Goa.

Survey was cross-sectional and community based. A sample of 300 males aged 15-49 years selected by stratified random sampling. An "UNAIDS protocol for measurement of HIV/STD prevention indicators" was used. SPSS software package was used for statistical analysis.

One hundred and ninety eight (66%) males reported ever having sexual intercourse, of these 17% were single. Fifty three (17.7%) males reported intercourse with a non-regular partner in the past 12 months, of these 90.6% had intercourse with strangers, 92.5% had paid for sex and only 43.4% had used a condom for the last sexual encounter with a non-regular partner. Less educated males (<10th class), single and those employed have higher sexual indulgence with non-regular sexual partners. The level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS was very high in all areas of causation and prevention.

Although the awareness about sexual risk behavior was high, condom use was very low resulting in high risk behavior related to HIV/AIDS and STDs among males. The study highlights the need for more effective behaviour change communication (BCC) strategies in the community as well as innovative methods like village level peer education.

Keywords : Knowledge, HIV/AIDS, Sexual behavior, Behavior Change Communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Risk taking in sexual encounters like casual sexual activities, unprotected intercourse with a stranger, multiple partners and early coital debut are on the rise. In spite of attempts to create public awareness about the dangers of HIV transmission, no commensurate change in sexual behavior is seen to be occurring¹. As the Indian society is getting more westernized, sexual behaviors are changing rapidly especially so in youths who are taking risk in spite of their increasing knowledge about transmission of STDs and HIV/AIDS.

This study explores the sexual risk behaviours and the knowledge of HIV/AIDS among males in a rural community in Goa. The state unlike the rest of India is highly westernized as a result of nearly five centuries of Portuguese rule. It is one of the most literate state with the best demographic and health parameters in the country and is the hub of tourism in South Asia.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The cross-sectional research study was conducted in a rural community in the state of Goa in 2002 wherein 300 males between the ages of 15 to 49 years were selected by stratified random sampling. The age groups used were 15-24 yrs, 25-34 yrs, 35-49 yrs as recommended by the UNAIDS protocol. A structured questionnaire in the vernacular based on the "UNAIDS Protocol For Measurement of HIV/STD Prevention Indicators"² was developed for interviewing the study subjects confidentially at their homes

after informed consent and guarantee of anonymity. A non-regular sexual partner (NRSP) was defined as one who is not married but had a sexual relationship with some one during last 12 months or out of wedlock if married. For questions on knowledge, if the respondent correctly identified a preventive practice/ mode of causation (or non causation), it was called a correct response. The data was analyzed using SPSS Software package.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 300 males interviewed, 198 (66%) reported ever having sexual intercourse. The sexual involvement with non-regular partners was reported by 17.7% (53/300) during past one year. Hawkes S. et al (2002)³ found that non-regular partners in the past one year were reported by 8.8% males in Matlab, Bangladesh. The reported mean age at first intercourse was 25.9 yrs (range : 18-32) in the study sample; 26.6 years (range: 20-32) among married males as compared to 22.7 years (range: 18-30) among single males.

Out of 53 males reporting non-regular sexual partners, 15.2% had 3 to 4 partners in the past one year, 37.7% had two partners and 47.1% had one partner. A majority (84.8%) had either one or two non regular partners in the past 12 months. A study⁴ in London (West) reported that out of 623 males interviewed 14% reported more than 5 partners in past 12 months, 32.6% reported 3-5 partners, 29.6% reported 2 partners and 23.6% reported 1 partner.

Of the 136 single males, 25%(34/136)

Table 1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of males and their risk behaviour in Rural Goa

Factor	Males (300)	%	% having NRSP % (No.)		Odds Ratio (95 %CI)
Age 15-24	94	31.4	19.1	(18)	1.13(0.52-2.45)
25-34	96	32.0	16.7	(16)	0.96(0.43-2.11)
35-49	110	36.6	17.3	(19)	1.0
All	300	100.0	17.7	(53)	
Education					
No education	4	1.3	25.0	(1)	2.3(0.04-30.14)
1-10	146	48.7	22.6	(33)	2.01(1.04-3.91)
>10 th	150	50.0	12.7	(19)	1.0
Occupation					
Employed	199	66.3	20.6	(41)	2.54(0.90-7.77)
Unemployed	47	15.7	14.9	(7)	1.72(0.44-6.84)
Student	54	18.0	9.2	(5)	1.0
Marital status					
Single	136	45.3	20.6	(28)	1.44(0.76-2.72)
Married	164	54.7	15.2	(25)	1.0

reported sexual activity and 20.6% (28/136) reported non-regular sexual partners (NRSP) in past one year in comparison to 15.2% (25/164) NRSP among married males (OR=1.44; 95%CI: 0.76-2.72) (Table 1). Another study⁵ in Vietnam concluded that 6-16% of unmarried males reported sexual activity and 55.9% males had sex before marriage in Bangladesh³.

Out of 53 males reporting non-regular partners in last 12 months; 90.6% said that the partner was a stranger; 92.5%(49/53) paid for having sex. Non-regular sexual activity therefore, mostly involved paid sex and unknown partners. A study³ in Bangladesh reported that 18% of males ever purchased sex and in Vietnam⁵ it is reported to be 1-3%.

Out of 53 males reporting non-regular

partner in past one year, 43.4%(23) reported condom use at the last sexual intercourse with a non-regular partner whereas 56.6% reported unprotected last sexual intercourse with a non-regular partner. In Vietnam condom use with non-regular partner ranged from 7%-21%⁵ and study from West London⁴ reported that 38% of males always used condoms with non-regular partners whereas 14.2% never used condoms.

Out of 34 single males reporting sexual activity, 26(76.5%) were using condoms. Condom usage is very high among the unmarried males in the study sample. This probably reflects the degree of awareness among the unmarried who are usually young and more responsive to their safety as the awareness campaigns being carried out in the state.

Table 2 : Knowledge about HIV/AIDS causation and prevention

Knowledge areas (UNAIDS Protocol)	Correct response (N=295)	(%)Correct response
Preventive practices(PP)		
Mutual faithfulness	278	94.2%
Condom use	284	96.3%
sterilized Needles/syringes	280	94.9%
All 3 PP factors	271	91.8%
Causation (Disease spread Through)		
Touch of HIV infected persons	243	82.3%
Sharing food with HIV infected person	251	85.1%
Public toilets	238	80.6%
Mosquito bite	253	85.7%
All 4 Causation factors	233	78.9%

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS Causation and prevention

The knowledge about preventive practices and causation of HIV/AIDS was assessed among males using UNAIDS Protocol that emphasis on non leading and indirect questions to assess the level of knowledge. Knowledge was assessed in 295 individuals who had heard of HIV/AIDS. Since five males had never heard of HIV/AIDS, they could not be questioned on knowledge of preventive practices and HIV causation.

As far as preventive practices are concerned, 94.2% were aware that mutually faithful relationships protect against HIV transmission. Condom use as protective practice was reported by 96.3% of study participants, sterilization of needles & syringes as a preventive practice was identified by 94.9% of the study participants. About 91.8% of males

were aware of all three preventive practices. It can be inferred that those who had heard of HIV/AIDS were also well aware of prevention of HIV transmission and thus knowledgeable about the major routes of transmission. Porter SB⁶ reported that 97% males were aware of sexual route of transmission and 83% of contaminated needles as source of infection. Interestingly, in all 78.9% males were aware that the HIV is not transmitted by touching an HIV infected person or sharing food with him or using public toilets or mosquito bites. Individually, 82.3% of study participants knew that HIV is not transmitted by touching an HIV infected person, food sharing (85.1%), Using public toilet (80.6%) and not transmitted by mosquitoes bites (85.7%). Although the level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS was very good, the prevalence of high risk sexual behavior was high. However, the

use of condoms, an important preventive practice was very low. This reinforces the fact that knowledge doesn't always translate into practice thereby questioning the role and impact of current awareness programs.

The study highlights the urgent need for a behavior change oriented awareness programs in the community. The Behavior Change Communication (BCC) strategy could be an effective tool to inculcate better and safe sexual indulgence. Innovative methods like introducing peer education at village level also need to be explored.

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