Original Research Article

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A study on awareness about HIV among female sex workers of Davangere, Karnataka, India: a cross-sectional study

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ABSTRACT

Background: HIV/AIDS is a major medical, public health as well as a grave socioeconomic challenge to the world. In India, sexual transmission is responsible for 87 percent of reported HIV cases. Female sex workers form a separate and largest group among the core high risk groups. The main objectives were to know the level of awareness about HIV among female sex workers of Davangere city, Karnataka, India.

Methods: A Cross-sectional community based descriptive study conducted at Davanagere city involving 200 female sex workers using modified questionnaire of behaviour surveillance survey.

Results: The mean age was 32.7 years. 64% were illiterates, 56.5% were married and living with their spouse. Good proportion of participants had awareness about the mode of spread & prevention of HIV, but the awareness needs to be improved in some components.

Conclusions: The proportion of awareness would be because of the exposure of female sex workers to the targeted intervention programme which helps them in understanding about the disease.

Keywords: Condom, HIV, Female sex workers

INTRODUCTION

HIV/AIDS is a major medical, public health as well as a grave socioeconomic challenge to the world. In India, sexual transmission is responsible for 87 percent of reported HIV cases. The core high risk groups (HRGs) of individuals includes female sex workers (FSWs), men who have sex with men (MSM), transgenders (TGs) and injecting drug users (IDUs).²

Female sex worker (FSW) refers to an adult woman who engages in consensual sex for money or payment in kind.² Female sex workers form a separate and largest group among the core high risk groups.3 The higher risk

of FSWs is reflected in a substantially higher prevalence of HIV among them than in the general population. HIV prevalence among FSWs in India is 4.9%, which is ten times higher than pregnant women (0.49%) attending antenatal clinics.4 In India, Karnataka is recognized as one of the six states with high HIV prevalence. 5,6 The level of awareness about HIV will determine the behaviour & approach of FSW's in protecting themselves from HIV/STI and prevent further transmission of the same.

Objectives: To know the level of awareness about HIV among female sex workers of Davangere city, Karnataka, India.

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METHODS

Study design

Cross sectional community based descriptive study was conducted at Davanagere city from 16-01-2011 to 15-01-2012.

Study participants

Female sex workers practicing sex-work for atleast past one year and consenting to participate were included in the study.

Data collection

Female sex workers were approached with the assistance of NGO peer educator working in this area as a part of targeted intervention programme. They were used as a window to enter into the network of female sex workers and further sex workers. All subjects were informed about the purpose of study and interviewed after obtaining informed consent and assuring confidentiality.

Sampling

Sample size was calculated on the basis of reported 47% STI morbidity by Thakor HG et al among female sex workers and fixing 15% as the relative precision using formula 4PQ/D². Sample size was calculated to be 200 FSW's. FSW's were selected randomly. Subjects were interviewed by using the standard questionnaire of Behavioural Surveillance Surveys (BSS) after suitable adaptation to local situation. Data was presented in suitable tables and analysed applying percentage proportions.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that out of 200 FSW's included in our study, 36% of them were below 30 years of age. The

mean age of respondents was 32.7 years. 89% of them were Hindus and 11% were Muslims. 64% were illiterate. Currently 56.5 % FSW's were married and living with their spouse. Table 2 shows that all of them had heard about HIV and good proportion of them had correct awareness about the mode of spread of HIV. Table 3 shows that 83% were that HIV can be prevented by avoiding penetrative sex 79% were aware that spread of HIV can be prevented by consistent use of condom and 84.5% were aware that HIV can be prevented by being with one uninfected faithful partner. The awareness about the treatment facilities available for HIV is less (Table 4). Symptoms/ presentation of HIV: The most commonly quoted symptoms are Genital discharge (65%), Genital ulcers (40%), burning pain during urination (45%), abdominal pain (73), other symptoms mentioned are weakness, fever, hair loss, discoularisation of face, jaundice, red eye, weight loss, loose stools.

Table 1: Background information of the participants.

Variable	Variable categories	Number N= 200	Percentage
Age (years)	18 - 29	72	36.0
Mean age=	30 - 39	85	42.5
32.7	≥ 40	43	21.5
Doligion	Hindu	178	89
Religion	Muslim	22	11
	Illiterate	128	64.0
Education level	Primary school	37	18.5
	High school & above	35	17
Marital	Married & living with spouse	113	56.5
status	Separated	79	39.5
	Never married	8	4

Table 2: Awareness of participants about HIV & its mode of transmission.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Question	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Have you heard of disease transmitted by sexual route?	199 (99.5)	1 (0.5)	
Have you ever heard of HIV?	200 (100)	0 (0)	
Whether HIV spreads by sexual route?	166 (83)	16 (8)	18 (9)
Can HIV spread from pregnant to foetus?	165 (82.5)	12 (6)	23 (11.5)
Whether breastfeeding transmits HIV to child?	109 (54.5)	55 (27.5)	36 (18)
Can healthy looking person have HIV?	126 (63)	49 (24.5)	25 (12.5)
Whether HIV spreads by using same needle?	187 (93.5)	2(1)	11 (5.5)
Whether HIV spreads by mosquito bite?	105 (52.5)	60 (30)	35 (17.5)
Whether HIV spreads by sharing meal with infected person?	69 (34.5)	115(57.5)	16 (8)

Table3: Awareness of participants about methods of preventing HIV transmission.

Correct awareness about methods of preventing HIV transmission (N = 200) Proportion correctly								
Can be prevented by avoiding penetrative sex		Can be prevented by consistent use of condom		with one uninfected faithful		identifying a	identifying all three modes N = 200	
Yes		Yes		sex partner: Y	Zes	11 - 200		
Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
166	83.0	158	79.0	169	84.5	145	72.5	

Table 4: Awareness about the treatment facilities for HIV.

Question	Yes	No	Don't know
Whether there is treatment for HIV	128 (64)	10 (5)	62 (31)
Whether HIV is curable	36 (18)	16 (8)	148 (74)
Have u heard of ICTC	28 (14)	172 (86)	
Have u heard of ART centre	34 (17)	166 (83)	

DISCUSSION

Female sex workers are one of the important links in the transmission of HIV to general population. Only the high level of awareness associated with high commitment towards it can change the direction of the epidemic. Our study involving 200 female sex workers from Davanagere city showed that, mean age of participants was 32.7 years which corroborates with studies done by Ramesh BM et al, Roy A, Blanchard JF et al. 8-10 All our study population have heard of HIV which is similar to the observations made in National Behavioural Surveillance Survey in Karnataka but very less proportion (44.2%) of FSW's have heard about HIV in a study conducted by Todd CS et al. 1,11 The level of awareness were similar to observations made by BSS survey in Karnataka in most of the components and better than National average in part of them. The better awareness level could be attributed to the exposure of the FSW's to the targeted intervention programme. The level of transformation of the awareness into actual practise plays a major role in determining the success of the intervention programmes.

CONCLUSION

Even though the level of awareness is better in mode of transmission and prevention measures through sexual transmission, there is inappropriate knowledge in some of the components. The knowledge should be converted to practise. Then only it can make a significant change in the disease scenario.

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