

# LEVEL OF AWARENESS ABOUT HIV/AIDS AMONG TRUCK DRIVERS AND THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS PERSONS WITH AIDS

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** HIV thrives on mobile population. Truck drivers particularly the long distance truck drivers are more vulnerable to HIV infection, because they travel a lot, remain cut off from the mainstream society, often engage in activities such as having unsafe sex with commercial sex workers and fellow crew members, in order to reduce their loneliness.

**Material & Methods:** In this study 75 truck drivers at Badami Bagh Truck Stand, Lahore, Pakistan, were interviewed on non-random basis, using convenient sampling technique. A questionnaire was designed as a tool for data collection to assess the level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and the attitude towards persons with AIDS.

**Results:** It was found that 50% of the truck drivers did not know whether needles had any role in the spread of HIV/AIDS. 30-40% thought that needles had nothing to do with the transmission of AIDS. Forty to fifty percent of respondents had the misconception that AIDS can be contracted by casual contact and by being in the same room with a person with AIDS. Two third of the truck drivers did think that monogamy and condom use is an effective method for AIDS prevention. An association between low knowledge of AIDS and high negative attitude towards persons with AIDS was found to exist, which was statistically significant.

**Conclusion:** Long distance truck drivers in Pakistan have serious gaps in their knowledge about HIV/AIDS, especially its modes of transmission, signs /symptoms and prevention. They also have a negative attitude towards persons with AIDS. Low knowledge of HIV/AIDS leads to negative attitude towards persons with AIDS.

**Key words:** Truck driver, Unsafe sex, HIV, AIDS.

## INTRODUCTION

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) remains a public health problem of major significance in most parts of the world. AIDS is threatening the very existence of human kind, as one out of every 100 is affected by this disease in the world. At present, in Pakistan 1501 person are HIV positive and 199 are suffering from AIDS.<sup>1</sup> Unsafe sex is also a route of transmission for other sexual diseases.<sup>2</sup> AIDS predisposes to chronic infectious diseases as well.<sup>3</sup> There is drug and other treatment failure for AIDS.<sup>4,5,6</sup> The unsafe sexual behavior among HIV infected individuals may vary.<sup>7</sup>

In the province of Punjab the total number of HIV positive persons was 360 and 40 patients had AIDS. WHO estimates the number of HIV positive persons in Pakistan to be 80,000.<sup>1</sup> Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the cause of AIDS, poses a serious concern for Pakistan. The groups at increased risk of acquiring HIV infection are persons with risky behavior, blood and blood product recipients, IV drug users, sex vendors and buyers; both heterosexual and homosexual, jail inmates and

patients treated with un-sterilized medical instruments.

HIV thrives on mobile population. Truck drivers, particularly long distance truck drivers are more vulnerable to HIV infection, because they travel a lot (day and night), often out of homes for months. They are free from social pressures of the family. The drivers, looking for alternative outlets for their sexual drives and to reduce their loneliness have been known to visit sex workers quite frequently. Unsafe sex with commercial sex workers and fellow crew members is not uncommon. Studies show that the number of visits to sex workers by mobile population is proportional to the available disposable income when away from home. In a study conducted in India the truck drivers admitted that sex is mostly performed without thinking, under the influence of opium and alcohol. Studies show that up to 25 percent of the truck drivers are affected by STDS /AIDS.<sup>8</sup> This is further compounded by poor knowledge amongst the truck drivers about AIDS, sexual health and the associated high risk of contacting HIV/AIDS through unsafe sexual practices.

This study has been designed to explore the level of awareness about HIV infection among truck drivers and their attitude towards persons with AIDS.

## MATERIAL & METHODS

Seventy-five truck drivers were interviewed on non-random basis, using the convenient sampling technique, at Badami Bagh Truck Stand, Lahore. A questionnaire was designed as a tool for data collection comprising of 12 questions to assess the level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS, and their attitude towards persons with AIDS. Personal interviews were conducted. The questions were pre-tested on eight truck drivers.

The hypothesis for the study was that lower the level of awareness about HIV/AIDS among truck drivers, higher the negative attitude towards persons with AIDS. In order to test the hypothesis, each answer was assigned a score. For the level of awareness category, if the respondent said 'yes' to knowing about, HIV/ AIDS, signs, symptoms and high risk groups of AIDS, then they were given a score of 1, otherwise 0. Score was '2, 0, and 1' for responses of 'yes, no and don't know' respectively, to questions about prevention and modes of transmission of HIV infection by skin piercing with infected needle, blood transfusion, sexual contact with infected person, needle sharing in drug abuse, and using un-sterilized hypodermic needle for injection. Similarly for responses of 'yes, no and don't know' to knowing about spread of AIDS by casual contact, using drugs, sharing utensils and room, score of '0, 2, and 1' were given. There were twenty items in the AIDS knowledge category, and a respondent could score a maximum of 36 points and minimum of zero. Median of the scores was taken for dividing into 'high'

or 'low' awareness groups. Those scoring 17 or less, were grouped as having 'low' awareness about AIDS and scorers of 18-36 points were considered to be highly aware about the disease.

For measuring the attitude, if the respondents agreed, disagreed or were indifferent, they were given score 2, 0 and 1, respectively, to working, shaking hands, sitting together, and sharing food with a person having AIDS. Similar scores were given for allowing the AIDS patients to live in their neighborhood, keep their disease secret, and be able to continue friendships. Those scoring < 8 were considered to have an unfavorable attitude, where as scores of 8-16 were thought to be favorable towards a person with AIDS. A 2x2 table was constructed, based on the scores just above or below the median, for level of awareness and attitude towards a person with AIDS. Chi-square test was applied and contingency co-efficient calculated.

## RESULTS

Nearly half of the respondents (48%) were in the age group of 22-34 years. About 38% were between 35-47 years and the remaining 14% were 48 years or above. Fifty-one percent of the respondents were illiterate, 33% had primary level education and only 16% received middle to matriculate level education.

A significant proportion of the respondents (85%) were married, whereas 15% were bachelors. Seventy-seven percent of the truck drivers had a monthly income of Rs. 6000 or less.

The descriptive results of Table 1 suggest that half the respondents did not know whether needles had any role in the spread of HIV infection and another 30-40% thought that needles had nothing to

**Table 1: Responses to the questions about knowledge of the respondent on transmission of HIV/AIDS**

Categories	Yes	%	No	%	Don't Know	%
Skin pricking	11	14.7	24	32	40	53.3
Casual contact	32	42.6	23	33.7	20	26.7
Blood transfusion	25	33.3	15	20	35	46.7
Sexual contact	30	40	25	33.3	20	26.7
Needle sharing while using drugs	15	20	18	29	42	56
Using hypodermic needles	8	10.7	30	40	37	49.3
Being in the same room	36	48	13	17.33	26	34.7
Sharing utensils	14	18.7	15	20	46	61.3
Using drugs	20	26.7	25	33.3	30	40

do with the transmission of AIDS. Only one third believed that AIDS could be transmitted by blood transfusion while another 33% thought that sexual contact with an infected person was not dangerous. Forty to fifty percent of respondents had the misconception that AIDS can be contracted by casual contact and being in the same room with a person with AIDS.

Table 2 shows that almost 50% of truck drivers did not think that spread of HIV infection could be

prevented by using a new disposable syringe for injection when needed. It was interesting to note that two third of the truck drivers did think that monogamy and condom use is an effective method for AIDS prevention. Forty-four percent of the respondents did not see any utility of HIV testing prior to blood transfusion as an effective AIDS prevention strategy.

Table 3 shows the attitude of respondents towards the patients with AIDS. The data shows that

**Table 2: Knowledge of the respondents about AIDS prevention**

Preventive measures	Effective		Non-effective		Don't know	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Use of new disposable syringe for medication	27	36	37	49.3	11	14.7
Avoid sexual contact with high-risk group	34	45.34	25	38.33	16	21.33
Discourage pregnancy in women with HIV infection	7	9.3	13	17.3	55	73.3
Getting HIV testing on blood for transfusion	20	26.7	33	44	22	29.3
Limiting to one sexual partner	50	66.7	10	13.3	15	20
Boiling of sharp instruments before use	25	33.3	26	34.7	24	32
Using condom during sexual contact with an infected person	49	69.3	12	16	14	18.7

**Table 3: Attitude towards persons with AIDS**

Suggestion	Agree		Disagree		Indifferent	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Person with AIDS should work together	15	20	44	58.7	17	22.7
Person with AIDS to shake hands	28	37.3	38	50.7	9	12
Person with AIDS witting together	26	39.7	30	40	19	25.3
Person with AIDS witting together	26	39.7	30	40	19	25.3
Person with AIDS sharing food with you	25	33.3	29	38.7	21	28
Person with AIDS may live freely in society	28	37.3	41	54.7	6	8
Person with AIDS may keep it secret	36	48	27	38	18	24
Person with AIDS can still be a friend	21	28	38	50.7	8	10.7
Person with AIDS may live in their neighborhood	37	49.3	26	39.7	12	16

the majority of respondents was not in favor of allowing the patients with AIDS to move freely in the society, sharing food with other, shaking hands, sitting and working with others. A larger proportion of respondents showed favorable attitude towards permitting the patients with AIDS to keep their disease a secret, and to live in their respective streets. A number of the respondents showed the unfavorable attitude towards continuation of the friendship with the patients with HIV/AIDS.

It was assumed that the lower the level of awareness about AIDS among truck drivers the higher the negative attitude towards the patient with AIDS. Level of knowledge of AIDS was made the independent variable and the attitude toward persons with AIDS was considered to be dependent on the awareness. Chi-square test was applied to see if there was any association between the two variables. Table 4 shows the 2x2 table constructed to see the association.

Table 4 shows that 16/75 of the respondents with high knowledge of AIDS had high negative attitude toward AIDS patients, where as 30/75 of those with low knowledge of AIDS showed the high negative attitude (46/75 with high negative attitude). On the other hand out of those respondents who had high level of awareness 23/75 showed low negative attitude compared with 6/75 who had low level of awareness also showed low negative attitude (29/75 of low negative attitude). The  $\chi^2$  application gave 11.02 value which represents P value < 0.01.

**Table 4: Association between awareness about AIDS and attitude towards a person with AIDS**

Attitude	Knowledge		Total
	High	Low	
High (negative)	16	30	46
Low (negative)	23	6	29
Total	39	36	75

$$\chi^2 = 11.02 \text{ (p} < 0.01)$$

## DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis of present study of 75 truck drivers from Badami Bagh Truck Stand Lahore suggests that the level of awareness about HIV/AIDS of the respondents was low. A large number of respondents had no knowledge about the mode of transmission of AIDS, high-risk groups, sign and symptoms of AIDS and causes of HIV/AIDS infection. A high proportion of respondents were not aware as to how the HIV infection could be transmitted

through blood transfusion, casual contact and needle sharing while using drugs. Awareness about signs and symptoms of AIDS was very low among truck drivers. High proportion of the respondents showed favorable attitude towards allowing the patients with HIV/AIDS to keep their disease as secret. Majority of respondents showed unfavorable attitude towards permitting the people to continue friendship with AIDS patients.

Table 4 provides the evidence to believe that a link existed between the level of awareness about AIDS among truck drivers and their nature of attitude towards patients with HIV/AIDS. Chi-square revealed a value of 11.02, with p value < 0.01. It further endorsed the conclusion that an association existed between the two variables. It can thus be concluded that the level of awareness about AIDS negative attitude towards patients with HIV/AIDS may be the outcome of low level of awareness about AIDS among truck drivers.

The result of the study supported the research findings of Ayshia<sup>12</sup> who has conducted a study to assess "the level of awareness about HIV/AIDS among middle and low class".

A study conducted by Raza et al<sup>9</sup> in Lahore, to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice towards AIDS, in a sample of 1200 young persons, found that 89.2% of the youth were aware of the existence of AIDS. Only 25.3% had the correct knowledge of etiology of AIDS. Their attitudes towards AIDS sufferers were negative and 76.7% actually thought that they should be isolated. In the 1995 NHIS in USA, information was collected about the knowledge of HIV and AIDS among 71.37% of persons. Analysis demonstrated that socioeconomic status was a better predictor of AIDS knowledge than race and ethnicity, and exposure to AIDS. Mass media had the strongest effect on AIDS knowledge.

Rao<sup>10</sup> concluded in a study in 1998 that up to 25% of the truck drivers was affected by STDs/AIDS due to the poor level of information and awareness about AIDS, sexual health and associated high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through unsafe sexual practices. In a similar study by Singh,<sup>11</sup> it was found that a large number of truck drivers were having sex with prostitutes in rural areas along the highways of India. Some were having sex with men also. HIV/AIDS awareness and condom use was poor among them. Three out of 302 truck drivers were found to be infected with HIV.

## CONCLUSION

It was concluded that a large number of the respondents had serious gaps in their knowledge about AIDS especially its modes of transmission, signs, symptoms and prevention. Also a high pro-

portion of the respondents showed poor attitude towards the patient with HIV/AIDS. An association between low knowledge of AIDS and high negative attitude towards persons with AIDS was found to exist, which was statistically variable.

The study gives some direction for prospective studies assessing the knowledge and attitude of truck drivers or other population with similar demographic characteristics.

This study has its limitations due to smaller sample size, convenient sampling and possibility of interviewer bias.

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