

HIV/AIDS: Knowledge and extra marital sexual behaviour of boatmen in Fewa Lake

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Abstract

The participants of the Training Workshop on HIV/AIDS and development, which was held in Pokhara under the project "Participatory Planning and Management of HIV/AIDS", decided to conduct a rapid assessment study on HIV/AIDS among the boatmen of Fewa Lake. This descriptive study conducted by using structured questionnaire attempts to explain the knowledge and extra marital sexual behaviour of selected boatmen of the Fewa Lake in Pokhara.

Almost all the boatmen (98%) had heard about HIV/AIDS and the majority of them have had fairly accurate knowledge about its route of transmission except a few, who had some misconceptions about the route of transmission. About 50% of the respondents practice sex outside their marriage and the majority (71%) of them are between 15-35 years of age. Condom use during such sex activities is not known.

In spite of good knowledge about HIV/AIDS, sex practices of boatmen are not free from risk particularly the young boatmen who are most vulnerable.

Keywords: Boatmen; HIV/AIDS; Extra marital sex; Transmission.

Introduction

Since first reported in 1998, the number of HIV has reached 1431 by the end of 1999. About 73% of all HIV positives are within the age group 14-29 years and about 95% are within the age group 15-39 years. According to the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, the positivity rate calculated among the voluntarily testing individuals for 1998 was 6.09 whereas it was only 3.58 for 1997. The current UNAIDS estimate for HIV infection in Nepal is about 30,000.

Objectives and method of study

The overall objectives of the study were to identify:

- the knowledge and behaviour of the boatman on HIV/AIDS, route of transmission, non-transmission and preventive measures and
- extra-marital (sexual) behaviour of boatmen

A questionnaire, consisting of a series of questions leading to the objectives of the study, was administered to randomly selected boatmen.

According to the secretary of Fewa Boat Association, there are about 300 registered boats, each with a boatman. Given the nature of occupation of the boatmen, who would not afford long time for the interview, a purposive sampling method was applied. Available numbers of boatmen present at a given time were identified for the study. Altogether 51 (17%) respondents were interviewed.

Findings and discussion

1. Characteristics of the respondents:

Table I: Distribution of the respondents according to their age

Age Distribution	%

15-25	31
25-35	33
35-45	24
45-55	4
55+	8
Total	100

Table II: Educational status of the respondents

<i>Education</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Illiterate	10	20
Can read and write	5	10
Primary	4	8
Secondary	22	43
Secondary+	10	20
Total	51	100

Table III: Duration of the present occupation

<i>Duration of this occupation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Since 1 yr.	3	6
2 yrs	3	6
3 yrs	1	2
> 3 yrs	44	86
Total	51	100

Table IV: Cast distribution of the respondents

<i>Caste groups</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Lower Caste	14	27

Gharti Magar	11	22
Brahmin	10	20
Chettri	8	16
Giri	4	8
Newar	3	6
Majhi	1	2
Total	51	100

2. Knowledge on HIV/AIDS

2.1 Knowledge of the respondents on HIV/AIDS and the source of information

Table V: Knowledge of the respondents on HIV/ AIDS and the source of information

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Books/ Magazine</i>	<i>Radio/TV</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Street Drama</i>	<i>Total</i>
15-25	4	7	13	6	0	0	30
25-35	5	7	14	5	2	2	35
35-45	2	5	10	3	2	0	22
45-55	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
55-+	0	2	3	1	0	0	6
Total	11 (22%)	22 (44%)	42 (84%)	15 (30%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	*

(* Multiple answer)

Radio and Television are very popular sources of information for 84% of the respondents (ie 42 persons). Books/Magazines and Newspaper are the other major sources of information for 44%, and for 30%, their colleagues were the source of information. Other sources of information were passengers (for 22%), health professionals (for 8%) and street drama (for 4%). Younger groups appear to be more interactive than older groups with friends and passengers as well as have listened TV/Radio or have read books/magazine. This indicates clearly that youth can be approached through varieties of means more easily than older groups for HIV/AIDS education messages. Nonetheless, almost all the population (98%) in this profession have had heard about HIV/AIDS.

2.2 Knowledge on HIV/AIDS transmission and non-transmission

Table VI: Knowledge on HIV/AIDS transmission and non-transmission

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>		<i>Don't know</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	

Shaking Hands	2	4	47	94	1	2	50
Sharing toilet	4	8	45	90	1	2	50
Eating together	7	14	41	82	2	4	50
Sleeping together	10	20	38	76	2	4	50
Mosquito, Bed bug bite	33	66	11	22	6	12	50
Use of unsterilised equipment	44	88	3	6	3	6	50

While there exists a good level of right knowledge among the boatmen on the transmission and non-transmission of HIV/AIDS, considerable level of misconception is also found among the respondents. For instances, 66% of the respondents think that the virus is transmitted by the mosquito and bed bug bite if it bites HIV positive or AIDS person first. Similarly, 14% and 20% of the respondents think that eating together and sleeping together respectively (without sexual contact) with HIV positive or AIDS person can transmit the virus.

A large majority (94% and 90% respectively) did not see handshake or sharing the same toilet with an HIV+ person problem. In addition, use of unsterilised surgical equipment is seen as a serious threat by many (88%).

2.3 Knowledge on HIV/AIDS route of transmission according to the educational status of the respondents

Table VII: Knowledge on HIV/AIDS route of transmission according to the educational status of the respondents.

<i>Route of Transmission</i>	<i>Illiterate (n=9)</i>	<i>Literate (n=14)</i>	<i>Total (n=50)</i>
Multiple sex partner	3 (33%)	16 (39%)	19 (38%)
Use of unsterilised equipment	5 (56%)	25 (61%)	30 (60%)
Sexual relationship	2 (22%)	11 (27%)	13 (26%)
By transfusing infected blood	3 (33%)	13 (32%)	16 (32%)
Unsafe sex (Sex without condom)	3 (33%)	17 (41%)	20 (40%)
By deep kissing	0	2 (5%)	2 (4%)
Barbers/hair cutting	0	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Mother to child	1 (11%)	2 (5%)	3 (6%)
Sharing the same soap	0	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Touching HIV+ or AIDS person	0	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
By having sex with animal	0	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Drug & alcohol (addiction)	0	1 (2%)	1 (2%)

Don't know	0	2 (5%)	2 (4%)
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(* Multiple answers) missing = 1

Table VII illustrates that the literacy and knowledge about the route of transmission appears to have direct relationship. Literate boatmen have relatively better knowledge than their illiterate counterpart. 60% of the respondents think that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted by using the unsterilised equipment. 40% of them think that the infection can be transmitted by unsafe sex (sex without condom) practice, whereas 38%, 32% and 26% of the respondents think that multiple sex partners, infected blood and sexual relations are other routes of transmission respectively. A small percentage of literate respondent think that the infection can also be transmitted by sharing the same soap, by touching the HIV positive or AIDS person, by the human and animal sexual relationship and by drug/alcohol drinking habit. Surprisingly, 5% of literate do not think the same.

2.4 Knowledge on preventive measures of HIV/AIDS

Table VIII: Preventive Measures

<i>Measures</i>	<i>%</i>
Single Partner	35
Avoid Multiple-partner	20
Safe Sex (use condoms)	69
Use only tested blood	8
Use only sterilised equipment	45
Faithful partner	10
Do not sleep together	2
Appropriate disposal of cough/urine	2
Don't know	2
Not responded	4
Avoid Pregnancy (if mother is +ve)	2
HIV test before marriage	2
Avoid HIV +ve persons	2
Do not eat food given by HIV +ve	2
Avoid HS, toilet sharing, eating together, sleeping together, mosquito bite	2

About 70% of the respondents think that safe sex (sex by using condom) is the best preventive measures to avoid the HIV infection. 46% of the respondents think that use of only sterilized equipment is important. 36% prefer single sex partner to prevent from being infected. 10% of the respondents said that the partner should be faithful, whereas 20% of them think that avoidance of multiple sex partner is important. 8% think that transfusion of tested blood is important.

On the other hand, a small percentage (6%) of the respondents think that avoiding sleeping with HIV positive or AIDS person, appropriate disposal of cough and urine, HIV test before marriage, avoiding HIV positive persons, avoiding eating any food given by HIV positive persons, and avoiding hand shaking, sharing of toilets, eating together and mosquito bites are the measures to be taken to prevent oneself from the infection.

3. Extra-marital behaviour (sex outside the married partner)

3.1 Extra marital sex ever had:

Out of 51 respondents, 48% had the history of extra marital relationship ever in their lifetime. Table IX shows that out of the total (ie, 24 persons), who had the history of extra-marital relationship, 54% of them had the extra-marital relationship before their marriage; 13% of them had the relationship after their marriage and 33% had the relationship before and after the marriage. 1/4 of sample population have had the history of extramarital relation before marriage and the majority of them are between the age of 15-25. The younger groups have had sexual exposure before marriage, are therefore vulnerable to HIV infection. Further study is necessary to assess such vulnerability of boatmen.

Table IX: Extra marital sex ever had (sex outside the married partner)

<i>History of extra-marital sex</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>% of Total (n=51)</i>
Before marriage	13	54	26
After marriage	3	13	6
Before & After marriage	8	33	16
Total	24	100	48

3.2 Age distribution and extra marital behaviour of the respondents

Table X: Age distribution and extra marital behaviour of the respondents

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Before Marriage</i>		<i>After Marriage</i>		<i>Before & After Marriage</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
15-25	7	54	0	0	1	13	8	33
25-35	2	15	2	67	5	63	9	38
35-45	4	31	0	0	2	25	6	25
45-55	0	0	1	33	0	0	1	4
55-+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	13	100	3	100	8	100	24	100

The highest percentage (38%) having extra marital affair belong to 25-35 year's age group. 33% of study population having a history of extra marital sex are in the age group of 15-25 years, whereas it is 25% in age group 35-45 years; 4% in age group 45-55 years and none in age group (55-+). dently, 71 % of extra marital sex happens between the age group of 15-35 years and the majority (54%) expressed that it happened before marriage.

3.3 Educational status and extra marital behaviour of the respondents

Table XI: Educational status and extra marital behaviour of the respondents

<i>Educational level</i>	<i>Before marriage</i>	<i>After marriage</i>	<i>Before & after marriage</i>	<i>Total</i>
Illiterate	0	2	2	4
Can read & write	0	0	0	0
Primary	0	0	3	3
Secondary	11	0	1	12
Secondary +	2	1	2	5
Total	13	3	8	24

Seventeen percentage of illiterate respondents had the history of ever extra marital relationship whereas the literate population was 83%. This interesting pattern of higher extra marital relationship among the literate and educated deserve further research. The reasons for this could be manifold, for example, mobility, opportunity of interaction, access to reading materials etc.

Given the fairly accurate knowledge about HIV/AIDS and its preventive measures among the majority of the respondents, the study population appears to be fairly safe. However, due to high prevalence of extra marital relationship, the possibility of risk of virus transmission cannot be dismissed.

The following are the additional comments made by the boatmen:

- It is quite common for them to have sexual relationships with foreigners and Nepali girls in the Lakeside. The use of condom depends upon the individual girl. If they (boatmen) think that the girl is safe then condom is not used.
- There are many people boating around and during that time, they often have sexual relationships by the lake. Sexual activity around the lake is very common.
- HIV/AIDS awareness programme is very important for the boatmen.
- I came to know that the mushroom is already proven as a medicine for AIDS.
- Fortunately, I turned out to be an HIV negative; once I was scared and forced myself for the blood test.
- There are many prostitutes wandering around the lakeside. Therefore it will be the right time and place to do something about HIV/AIDS.
- Self-consciousness is very important in the prevention of HIV infection.
- Enactment of strong rules and regulation for HIV positive and AIDS person's immigration.
- All boatmen know something about HIV/AIDS. The secretary of Fewa Boat Association said that it is a good idea to print the HIV/AIDS related messages in the boat. Many people will benefit from it.