

Sexual Behaviour among Young Migrant Women Workers in Urban India with Risk of HIV Infection

Background: In the recent years, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has become a major public health concern in India, especially in the mega cities which are experiencing large in-migration of people from various states of the country. Research on population mobility and HIV/AIDS risk among migrant populations is quite limited, and research on migrant women workers' vulnerability is further limited. The main objective of this study which was initiated in January 2005, is to explore migrant women worker's AIDS-related health information and health care facilities, perceptions about vulnerability, and risk behaviour profile.

Methods: Data was collected through a pre-tested questionnaire from a random sample of unmarried female migrant workers under 30 years of age residing in Delhi, India.

Results: Findings suggest that majority of the migrants in Delhi (83 percent) were from cities or towns. Only about one-third of the respondents have migrated from bigger cities mainly Lucknow, Kanpur, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Kolkata, Jaipur, Patna, and Pune. More than one-third of the migrants were from Uttar Pradesh (31 percent) and Uttaranchal (11 percent). More than half of the respondents were in the age-groups 23-25 (52 percent). Eleven percent were less than 22 years of age. Around 22 percent of the respondents got help from their friends in coming to Delhi and around 18 percent in getting a job. Majority of them (72 percent) got jobs in their friend's office or through the person well known to their friend. More than half of the respondents were staying in Delhi for the last 2-4 years.

Findings suggest that city life, greater independence and social networks mold their behaviour and lure them to lavish life styles by having rich boy friends, acquiring expensive items like, ipods, mobile, home theatre, computer, luxury car, visiting expensive restaurants, foreign visits, going to discos, clubs, and bars, attending late night parties. To maintain their lavish life style, 20 percent of them had sex with their peers, colleagues or boss for monetary benefits or in exchange of promotion and 10 percent had sex with multiple partners.

The high risk behaviour of these women put them at greater health risk, a substantial percentage of women have been found suffering from various sexual health problems. Irritation around genitals, pain in the vagina, low back ache, pain in lower abdomen not

related to menses and itching over vulva are the most common sexual health problems reported by majority (75 percent) of women, followed by swelling in the groin and difficulty/pain while urinating (25 percent). Alarmingly, 30 per cent of the respondents felt that they were vulnerable to HIV infection due to their life style. Very surprisingly, despite of being exposed to better life style, the overall knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS and its route of transmission is inadequate amongst the migrant women workers in Delhi.

Conclusions: It is really a matter of concern as these women are highly vulnerable and can easily be infected with the HIV, considering the fact that they are not well aware about safe sexual practices. Adequate measures needs to be taken at various levels to address this issue more seriously.