

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS among the Men Sex with Men (Kothis) in Puducherry

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ABSTRACT: Men who have sex with men (MSM) community are a highly complex, diverse and multi ethnic population. HIV infection among men who have sex with men (MSM) has been increasing in recent years around the world, particularly in Asia. This global trend is being seen in India, with the current estimated HIV prevalence among MSM ranging between 7 and 16.5 per cent. In India knowledge on HIV, HIV testing, sexually transmitted infection (STIs) prevalence among MSM is at low level. This quantitative investigation explored the experience and knowledge on HIV/AIDS among the Kothis (MSM) in Puducherry region. In this study 200 Kothis were interviewed and the data collected were analysed and have been presented here. the information.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge plays an important role in all spheres of human life and activity. It is a powerful factor which helps man to attain success, power and position in life. Knowledge directs his actions and enables him to find out the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. It helps him overcome his weakness and faults and face dangers and difficulties with courage and confidence. It gives him mental, moral and spiritual advancement. Knowledge is the awareness and understanding of facts, truths, or information gained in the form of experience or learning or through introspection (Asthana and Robert, 2001; Chakrapani *et al.*, 2002).

India is one of the largest and most populated countries in the world, with over one billion inhabitants. Of this number, it's estimated that around 2.4 million people are currently living with HIV. HIV

emerged later in India than it did in many other countries. Infection rates soared throughout the 1990s, and today this has spread as an epidemic affect in all sectors of Indian society, not just the groups – such as sex workers and truck drivers – with which it was originally associated (Chakrapani, *et al.*, 2004). In a country where poverty, illiteracy and poor health are rife, the spread of HIV presents a daunting challenge (United Nations General Assembly, 2010). Knowledge on HIV, HIV testing, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and prevalence among males having sex with males (MSM) is low. The levels of comprehensive knowledge about HIV among MSM includes 21 per cent in Uttar Pradesh; 30 per cent in Manipur; 32 per cent in Tamil Nadu; 22 per cent in Karnataka; and 57 per cent in Andhra Pradesh (Asthana and Robert, 2001; Van and de Lind, 2010; India MSM Country Snapshots, 2010). The present paper discusses about the HIV/AIDS knowledge among the Kothi respondents in the study area Puducherry, South India.

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METHODS AND MATERIALS

Descriptive research method has been adopted for this research. To achieve the goals of this study, the first hand data collection with the help of purposive sampling for case study and pretested structured interview schedules were used for collecting the data. Snowball sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. The primary data was collected through the help of interview schedule by direct participant observation research technique. The data have been collected from the selected samples from different cruising points in Puducherry region where the Kothis indulge in sexual activity. There is no exact enumerated population size of the MSM in the study area. These people are considered as invisible populations for the correct estimation. The researcher made an attempt to identify the people with MSM (men who are indulging in sex with men) activities, with the help of Sahodaran NGO which is working on MSM community members and there by a linkage was established through them in which the Kothis with MSM activities were selected as the sample study population. By following this snowball sampling technique a sample of 200 Kothi MSM were identified in Puducherry region for the research study. The study is focused in the Puducherry region and where these Kothi (MSMs) involve for their sexual activities. These activities mostly take places in the public parks, public toilets, bus stations, theaters and isolated public places. Such places are well known among the Kothi (MSM) and where they indulge in sexual activities.

Kothis: The Kothi group has many similarities with the Hijra group, but the main difference is that they tend to be much less feminine than the Hijra (Chakrapani *et al.*, 2002). Their main profession is sex as worker while they are dressed as females; however, they do not dress as females when they are not sex working. During anal sex, Kothi are both penetrated and penetrate, while they are also both the givers and receivers in oral sex (Khan, 2001).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS

TABLE 1
Awareness of the period of knowledge about HIV/AIDS among Kothi respondents

Years of awareness	Response	Percentage
1-4	61	30.5
5-8	98	49.0
9-12	24	12.0
13-16	11	5.5
17-20	6	3.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 1 shows how long the Kothi respondents are having knowledge about HIV/AIDS. The data reveals that around 49.0 per cent of the Kothis are having awareness about the dreadful disease for the past 5-8 years. 30.5 per cent of the Kothis are aware of the disease for the past 1-4 years. 12.0 per cent of them are aware about HIV/AIDS for past 9-12 years. Only 8.0 per cent of them know about the HIV/AIDS for the past 13-20 years.

TABLE 2
Media through which HIV/AIDS awareness was gained among Kothi respondents

Awareness about HIV/AIDS	Frequency	Percentage
Mass Media	20	10.0
Friends	28	14.0
NGO	152	76.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 2 shows the source of awareness of the Kothis about HIV/AIDS. The data shows that the NGO plays a vital role in creating the awareness about HIV/AIDS among 76.0 per cent of the Kothi respondents, followed by 14.0 per cent and 10.0 per cent through their friends and mass media respectively.

Table 3 shows the knowledge of the Kothis about the microorganism which is responsible for the spread of the HIV/AIDS. The data shows that 89.0 per cent of the Kothi respondents are well aware that the virus

TABLE 3

Kothi respondents' knowledge about the microorganism responsible for causing AIDS

Causes of AIDS	Frequency	Percentage
Virus	178	89.0
Bacteria	11	5.5
Don't know	11	5.5
Total	200	100.0

is the root cause for the HIV/AIDS disease and it acts as a carrier to other partners too. Only 11.0 per cent of them are not aware about the virus which carries the dreadful disease.

TABLE 4

Knowledge about the symptoms of HIV infection by the Kothi respondents

Symptoms of the diseases	Response	Percentage
Weight loss	9	4.5
Diarrhoea	8	4
Fever	11	5.5
Skin disease	30	15
Weight loss + Diarrhoea	1	0.5
Weight loss + Fever	29	14.5
Weight loss + Skin disease	0	0
Diarrhoea + Fever	26	13
Diarrhoea + Skin disease	2	1
Fever + Skin disease	11	5.5
Weight loss + Diarrhoea + Fever	24	12
Weight loss + Diarrhoea + Skin Disease	2	1
Weight loss + Fever + Skin disease	5	2.5
Diarrhoea + Fever + Skin disease	8	4
All the above	26	13
Don't Know	8	4
Total	200	100.0

Table 4 shows that 15.0 per cent of Kothi respondents have told that skin diseases is symptom of HIV/AIDS. 14.5 per cent of them have reported that weight loss and fever are symptom of HIV/AIDS. 13.0 per cent of the Kothi respondents have said that diarrhoea and fever are the symptoms of the HIV. 13.0 per cent of them have the knowledge that weight loss, fever, diarrhoea and skin diseases are symptoms of HIV/AIDS. 12.0 per cent of them have told that weight loss, diarrhoea and fever are the symptoms of HIV/AIDS. 5.5 per cent of the Kothi respondents have informed that fever is symptom of the disease and another 5.5 per cent have told that fever and skin

diseases are the symptoms of HIV. 4.5 per cent of them have reported that weight loss is the symptom, and 4.0 per cent of them have told that diarrhoea is the symptom of HIV. 2.5 per cent of the Kothi respondents have said that weight loss, fever and skin diseases are the symptoms of HIV. 4.0 per cent of the respondents are not aware of the symptoms of HIV/AIDS. It is inferred from the above table that 96.0 per cent of the Kothi respondents have the basic knowledge about the symptoms of HIV/AIDS.

TABLE 5

Kothi respondents' knowledge about possibility of permanent curing of HIV/AIDS if detected early

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, it can be cured	9	4.5
No, it can't be cured	184	92.0
Don't know	7	3.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 5 explains their knowledge on whether the HIV/AIDS can be permanently cured or not. Around 92.0 per cent of the respondents are aware that it cannot be permanently cured, and only 4.5 per cent of the respondents have said that it can be permanently cured.

TABLE 6

Kothi respondents' response about HIV/AIDS prevention

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, it can be prevented	184	92.0
No, it can't be prevented	14	7.0
Don't know	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

Their knowledge about the prevention of HIV/AIDS is explicated in the above Table 6, which narrates that 92.0 of the Kothis have the opinion that it can be prevented by having safe sex. 7.0 per cent have said it cannot be prevented.

TABLE 7

Kothi respondents knowledge of prevention of HIV/AIDS

Mode	Response	Percentage
Single Sexual Partner	12	6.5
Using Condom	157	85.3
Either way	15	8.2
Total	184	100.0

The above Table 8 shows that 92.0 per cent (184 respondents) have the knowledge of preventing transmission of HIV/AIDS infection and 85.3 per cent have suggested that using condom during sex will prevent HIV transmission. 8.2 per cent of them have informed that having single partner and using condom are the safe methods for preventing the HIV infection.

TABLE 8
Kothi respondents' knowledge about risk of multiple sex partners in HIV/AIDS transmission

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, increase risk	193	96.5
Not increase the risk	5	2.5
Don't know	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

The multiple sexual partners are the high risk factors of HIV/AIDS. The Kothi respondents' knowledge about this fact is presented in the Table 8 which shows that 96.5 per cent of the Kothis are of the opinion that having multiple sexual partners is a high risk factor for transmission of HIV/AIDS. 2.5 per cent of them are of the opinion that having multiple sexual partners is not that risky.

TABLE 9
Kothi respondents' knowledge about the mode of HIV/AIDS transmission

Mode	Response	Percentage
Dental care	3	1.5
Unsafe sexual contact	79	39.5
Deep kissing	3	1.5
Unprotected blood transfusion	57	28.5
Sharing of unsterilized needles	31	15.5
Mosquitoes	0	0.0
Infection from mother to fetus	24	12.0
Using common toilet	0	0.0
Don't know	3	1.5
Total	200	100.0

The knowledge of the Kothis about the mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS is presented in Table 9, which shows that a majority of 39.5 per cent of the Kothi respondents are of the opinion that unsafe sexual contact is the mode of HIV transmission. 28.5 per cent have responded that it is transmitted by unprotected blood transfusion, 28.5 per cent have said that it is by sharing unsterilized needle. 12.0 per cent of them are aware that the transmission mode is also

from infected mother to fetus. The study shows that the Kothi are aware of the five modes of transmission of HIV.

FINDINGS

The knowledge of HIV/AIDS among the Kothis shows that 96.0 per cent of the Kothis have the basic knowledge of HIV/AIDS and the symptoms of this dreadful disease. A majority of the respondents have reported that they have been aware of it for the past eight years. Mass media and especially NGOs play a major role in creating awareness among the Kothis. The dreadfulness of the disease is known to them and they are aware that it would arrest the whole immune system. 90.0 per cent of the Kothi respondents have said that HIV cannot be cured but it can be prevented by having safer sex. The best way of preventing HIV/AIDS is by using condoms. People having multiple sexual partners have high risk of HIV and particularly the MSM group has the very high risk of HIV/AIDS. To avoid the transmission of this disease both the partners should undergo medical checkup before marriage. Creating HIV/AIDS awareness among the people is the only way to control the risk of HIV.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

It can be concluded from the above study that Kothis are aware about the dreadful disease i.e. HIV/AIDS and they also aware of that the virus is the root cause for the HIV/AIDS disease, and it cannot be permanently cured. They have the opinion that it can be prevented by having safe sex and have the knowledge of preventing transmission of HIV/AIDS infection, the respondents also suggested that using condom during sex will prevent HIV transmission. They also have the awareness that having multiple sexual partners is a high risk factor for transmission of HIV/AIDS. There is an urgent need to create more HIV/AIDS awareness programmes among the Puducherry Kothis, and further there is need for policy planning by the Puducherry AIDS Control Society for conducting an in-depth research survey on the Kothi population in Puducherry for their welfare. The Puducherry AIDS Control Society and non-government organizations (NGOs) should also take initiative to provide more Voluntary Testing and Counselling Centers (VCTC) facilities to Kothis and

to their sexual partners for their future safe medical treatment.

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