

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Seroprevalence of Syphilis in MSMs in and Around Nagpur

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Abstract

Homosexuality is rarely discussed publically as it is considered a taboo subject by both Indian Civil Society and the government. Indian MSM (men who have sex with men) includes self-identified gay men. MSMs are one of the risk group targeted by National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) to reduce STDs along with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission. From the study it was tried to see the status of STDs among this special group of population in Nagpur region of India. The study was conducted in mobile ICTC in the Department of Microbiology, Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur with Sarathi Trust under TARANG Project over a period of two years from April 2012 to March 2014. From our study, we conclude that the prevalence of Syphilis is very low among this group of population in Nagpur region of India.

Key words: HIV, MSMs, STDs

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Introduction

Homosexuality is rarely discussed publically as it is considered a taboo subject by both Indian Civil Society and the government¹. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are more dynamic than other diseases prevailing in the community². Their epidemiological profile varies from country to country and from one region to another within a country. Only limited data are available about STI prevalence among MSM in India. Indian MSM (men who have sex with men) include self-identified gay men (Western acculturated), *kothis* (receptive partner), *panthis* (insertive partners) and *double deckers* (both receptive and insertive).³ MSMs are one of the risk group targeted by National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) to reduce STDs along with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission.

According to IPC 377 sexual relation between two men is a criminal offence. This led many MSMs to marry women and have children. Bisexual MSMs constitute an important bridge population for transmission of

HIV or STD. Thus, strategies focusing specifically on MSM for control of STDs and HIV are needed.¹ So, we conducted the study to estimate the seroprevalence of Syphilis in MSMs in and around Nagpur and to see the impact of targeted intervention program on Syphilis.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in mobile ICTC in the Department of Microbiology, Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur with Sarathi Trust under TARANG Project over a period of two years from April 2012 to March 2014. Through NGO, mobile ICTC team visited to gathering spot of MSMs in Nagpur and nearby places around Nagpur usually at evening time (4 pm to 9 pm). MSMs were given counseling and given knowledge regarding Syphilis along with other STIs and HIV, history of use of condom in last sexual act was taken. After taking consent, technician collected blood samples and subjected to modified VDRL test (RPR) for Syphilis along with HIV testing.

Observations & Results

Table- 1, shows 769 individuals tested in the year April 2012 to March 2013. Out of all 769 individuals, 2 (0.26 %) individuals were positive

for VDRL (Venereal Disease Research Laboratory) test in the year 2012-13. Table 2 shows 870 individuals tested in the year April 2013 to March 2014. Out of 870 individuals, none of the individuals shown positivity for VDRL test in the year 2013-14.

Table 1: VDRL testing in individual MSMs (2012-2013)

MSM	Once (%)	Twice (%)	>Thrice (%)	Total	Seropositive (%)
Kothi	386(50.19)	234(46.42)	9(39.13)	629	1(0.25%)
Panthi	227(29.52)	160(31.74)	11(47.82)	398	1(0.44%)
Double Decker	156(20.29)	110(21.84)	3(13.05)	269	-
Total	769	504	23	1296	2(0.26%)

Table 2: VDRL testing in individual MSMs (2013-2014)

MSM	Once (%)	Twice (%)	>Thrice (%)	Total	Seropositive (%)
Kothi	413(47.48)	130(57.26)	2(66.66)	545	-
Panthi	273(31.38)	65(28.65)	1(33.34)	339	-
Double Decker	184(21.14)	32(14.09)	0	216	-
Total	870	227	3	1100	-

Discussion & Conclusion

In the present study, the prevalence of syphilis is equal in kothis and panthis. No positivity found among double deckers. The overall prevalence of Syphilis was very low (0.12%), while Garg et al¹, in 2012, showed 27% prevalence of Syphilis in MSM. Studies from India shown nearly 20% of the MSMs to be affected by some STDs.¹ Table 3 below shows the prevalence of Syphilis in all four parts of the India.^{1,3,5}

Table- 3: Prevalence of Syphilis in all parts of India

States	Year	Prevalence
Chennai	2011	26%
Mumbai	2011	16%
Delhi	2012	27%
Eastern India	2012	7.7%

A study by Gedam & Ahmed, also showed low prevalence (3.07%) of Syphilis in HIV positive patients, 0.11% in general population and 1.07% in STD patients in Central India.⁴ From our study, we conclude that the prevalence of Syphilis is very low. It shows a regional variation and it may be due to the targeted intervention.

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Ethical Permission: Obtained

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