



## Awareness towards HIV/AIDS among Urban Adults

\* Pilu Hazarika

\* Research Scholar (Ph.D), Dept. of Sociology, Dibrugarh University, Assam

### ABSTRACT

**CONTEXT:** Information is the first step in human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention. Ignorance about the disease and how the virus is transmitted can generate fear and prejudice towards those who are infected. **OBJECTIVE:** To assess the awareness of the urban adults towards HIV/AIDS in Assam. **METHODS:** To gather information about young adults about HIV/AIDS, we collected 270 respondents from Doomdooma, Margherita and Chabua towns of Assam with the help of structure and unstructured interview schedule. **RESULTS:** The result shows that the level of awareness about different aspects of AIDS is unsatisfactory. The study reveals that most of the respondent had correct knowledge on some aspects of HIV/AIDS i.e., transmission and prevention but they are not fully aware of it. Therefore, it is essential to assess the knowledge, awareness of young people regarding HIV/AIDS to prevent the disease.

**Keywords :** HIV/AIDS, Awareness, Urban Adults

### Introduction:

**A**IDS which causes due to Human Immune-deficiency Virus (AIDS) has emerged an epidemic all over the world and it is infecting large sections of society and specially the youth. Globally, the estimated number of people living with HIV/AIDS is 34.4 million of which 31.3 million are adult (UNAIDS/WHO, 2008). Presently, the main global trend is that new HIV infections are heavily concentrated among young adults (15-24 years). Although prevalence of HIV is relatively lower in India than in other Asian countries, the epidemic is growing rapidly. As on 2008, the total no. of people living with HIV/AIDS in India is estimated to be 2.31 million (1.8-2.9 million) where adults aged 15-49 years constitute 88.7% of the estimated number of PLHA ([www.naco.com](http://www.naco.com)).

The AIDS scenario in the North-East has also been one of grave concern as it is evident from the fact that Manipur and Nagaland are now among the top six HIV hit states in the country. Assam too has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of AIDS and HIV positive people in the past few years. As per latest figures released by the Assam State AIDS Control Society, there are 4,251 people living with HIV and 230 people have died of HIV/AIDS in Assam (The Times of India, July, 2010).

Young people are particularly vulnerable to the HIV pandemic. Over half of all new infections worldwide are among young people between the ages of 15-24 (Tan et al. 2007). Indeed, these people are not only at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, they are also most vulnerable and the most affected section of the global population. Young people's vulnerability is associated with several potential risky situations, such as lack of knowledge and their tendency of experiment high risk behavior especially unsafe sexual practices, intravenous drug use as a result of curiosity and relatively more freedom in this period. But, it is seen that in spite of their high risk behaviors and vulnerability to HIV infection, research from around the world has indicated gaps in young people's knowledge about HIV transmission and the tools required for changing behavior. If these young people's

lack of adequate information regarding HIV knowledge and behavior, they might be hit hard by the HIV pandemic. Therefore, it is essential to assess the knowledge and awareness of young population regarding HIV/AIDS.

### Objective of the Study: The objectives of the study are -

1. To understand the awareness among the urban adults living in Chabua, Doomdooma and Margherita Town of Assam about HIV/AIDS

**Materials and Method:** Three towns were selected from Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district of Assam i.e., Doomdooma, Chabua and Margherita. 270 household were selected through simple random technique from each town. The respondents were interviewed in each sample household by administering structured and unstructured interview schedule duly pre-tested before used. The results were analysed and summarized using simple descriptive statistics.

**Findings and Discussion:** HIV epidemic in India is now in grim and most of the researches have remarked that HIV epidemic are increasing among the younger in age and it has attained a significant epidemic among the youths in our society. In this study we have taken certain major headings considered to be important to study about awareness of HIV/AIDS among urban adults

**Background information:** In this study we have taken information from various social backgrounds.

Out of 270 respondents 234 (86.66%) were males and 36 (13.34%) were females. All of the respondents were in the reproductive age group (18-49 years above). Linguistically Assamese are pre-dominant followed by Hindi, Oriya, Bengali, Nepali etc. In caste/tribe of the respondent, majority of the youth belong to general caste. Hindu are majority in numbers. Maximum number respondents are married. Occupationally most of the respondents are businessman followed by govt. servants, housewives, teachers, technical persons, skilled and unskilled workers, tea garden workers. Majority of the respondents studied up to higher secondary level. Only a few respondents are below matriculation and illiterate. It is also seen that very little respondents are post graduate and beyond higher education and technical education.

General HIV/AIDS knowledge: In this study, an attempt has been made to analyze the awareness of young people towards HIV/AIDS. It is important to raise the level of knowledge and awareness about HIV and its ways of transmission especially among young adult. The young age group is obviously a very vulnerable category because of high risk behavior especially unsafe sexual practices, intravenous drug use as a result of curiosity and relatively more freedom etc. That is why correct knowledge and HIV awareness is most important among these young people. Therefore, to access this situation we asked several questions with regard to the awareness of young people towards HIV/AIDS. Our first inquiry was "Have you heard about HIV/AIDS?" It was found that maximum no. of respondents (95.18%) had heard about HIV/AIDS which indicate that their basic awareness was good. Only a few respondents (4.82%) had never heard about it. Of those who had heard of HIV/AIDS were also asked about the first source of such knowledge. Most of the adult have heard about AIDS from mass media (73. %), television (47%), newspapers (15%), radio (11%). It is seen that television was their primary source followed by newspaper and radio. The second highest information about HIV/AIDS was collecting from friends (8%), schools/college (8%). 3% respondents obtained HIV/AIDS related information from posters and leaflets and (2%) family. Again, more than 6% respondents got their information from other sources such as internet.

In this study, it is seen that media were the most common means of about obtaining information about HIV/AIDS; especially television has an important role in raising AIDS awareness within the areas. In contrast, institutions such as school /college and friend were not very much important sources of information and only 8% of the respondents named schools/college and friends as their main sources of information. On the other hand, health workers had less important role in educating people, surprisingly a very few respondents said that their family members and relatives informed them about the disease. The sources of knowledge of HIV/AIDS for the adult population reported here are approximately similar to other previously studies (Wong, 2008 and Ayranic, 2005). Our findings suggest that although mass media plays an important role in gaining knowledge about AIDS, only mass media are not enough for disseminating the AIDS information especially among young adult. Thus some additional programme such as face to face communication and sexual education at institution may be effective. Government should encourage school teachers and health workers for achieving the success in HIV/AIDS. They should be more involve in AIDS education

When further asked "What is HIV?" many were unable to say correctly. Maximum no. of respondents (72.76%) said that HIV is a disease, only a very few respondents (27.24%) knew that it is a virus. Most of the respondents (95.83%) do not know the difference between HIV and AIDS. They believed that HIV is same as AIDS. Again those respondents who expressed that they have knowledge about where HIV attacks the parts of human body it was found that 85.99% respondents said blood, 3.11% said liver, 3.5% kidney and a very little respondents (7.39%) said that HIV attacks the immune system of human body. It is seen that very few respondents knew that HIV attacks the immune system. Majority of respondents are not aware of it. This finding is similar to other study (Saikia & Das, 2010). Misconceptions were still noted relating to recognition of HIV positive people and to cure for HIV/AIDS. 75.09% were having no idea whether HIV positive people could be recognized by their appearance and 69.64% respondents believed that there was a cure for AIDS, only a few (11.28%) reported that HIV/AIDS could not be cured. A small no. of respondents (19.06%) expressed ignorance about whether it is cure or not. The main problem with those who are unaware that an HIV infected person may be asymptomatic is that they are more at risk because they are unaware that they could be infected by an apparently healthy individual (Taher, 2011). Similarly, misinformation concerning a cure for HIV/AIDS

should be corrected as this misconception is also another risk factor for contracting the disease (Wong, 2008).

Regarding knowledge about the symptoms of disease whether they are aware of these or not. 83.65% respondents said that they have not seen a person with AIDS and therefore they could not say anything about the symptoms of AIDS. It was found that only a few respondents (16.35%) are aware of the symptoms of AIDS. Among these, maximum number of respondents (76.19%) had knowledge about weight loss and persistent fever and only a few numbers of respondents (23.81%) knows about lymph glands, chronic diarrhea, skin rashes, and coating on the mouth or throat.

Knowledge of HIV transmission and prevention: Proper knowledge regarding possible routes of transmission is not only crucial for decreasing the infection rate, but it is also important to dispel persistent myths as partial knowledge can further prolong the risk of infection (Taher, E. et al., 2011). We must learn about the causes and reason of spread of HIV infection but it is important to mention here that till date there is no cure for HIV and AIDS. Therefore, prevention is the only mechanism available in dealing with the epidemic. Evidence suggests that about 86 percent HIV infection in the country spread from irresponsible sexual behavior. Perinatal transmission of the infection is 2.72 percent, whereas 2.57 percent HIV infection is due to transfusion of infected blood or blood products. HIV transmission through injecting needles is only 1.97 percent of overall prevalence. In such a situation large scale awareness and mass sensitization is needed to people aware about the prevention strategy so that they can protect themselves from HIV infection. (Draft copy of Adolescence Education Programme, 2008)

In this study, we have collected information about the modes of transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS from the respondents. Most of the respondents knew that HIV is transmitted through sharing injecting needles with an infected person, having sexual relation with an infected person, receiving a transfusion of infected blood and from infected mother to her child but a majority (78.98%) were not aware of transmission of HIV during pregnancy and during breast feeding by an HIV infected mother to her child. Maximum numbers of respondents (81%) were not mentioned injecting drug user to become infected. Most of the respondents (84.82%) aware that HIV infection is not transmitted by sharing public toilets and swimming pools with an infected person, 86.77% respondents said that HIV infection is not transmitted by touching an infected person such as hugging, holding, shaking hands and 82.1% know that sharing the food utensils of an infected persons cannot transmitted the virus. It appears that majority of respondents knew about the risk of transmission of HIV/AIDS infection. However, a majority were not aware of other modes of transmission such as tattooing 81%, sharing of razor 76.12%, donating to another person the organs and tissue of an infected person 88.32%. These finding are disagree with findings of other studies (Ayranic, 2005 and Wong et al, 2008)

It was observed in this study that although the large majority of the study population had correct knowledge of the most common modes of transmission. Misconceptions were still held regarding nonsexual routes of transmission. Believed that HIV could be transmitted by mosquito bites (61.08%) and caring AIDS patients (72.76%). Other studies have also found a prevalence of this misconception among young adults (Tung et al, 2008; Wong, et al. 2008). This study showed that the majority of the respondents were aware that HIV transmission resulted primarily from high risk behaviors such as having unprotected sex and sharing needles. For these reasons, efforts should be made to provide accurate information and address misconception about HIV transmission.

As regards prevention, a greater no. of respondents (93.77%) believed that it could. Findings shows that majority of respondents had correct knowledge that HIV can be prevented by using condom during sexual relationship (85.5%) and having only one sex partner (87.2%), avoiding transfusion of blood and blood products not screened for HIV

(88.9%) but 86.5% respondents who have no any knowledge about using sterile needle during injection. Although the knowledge of HIV prevention method is good, but most sustained efforts are needed to make them fully aware of the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Knowledge on the availability of healthcare services:

Respondents were also queried on their knowledge of the availability of HIV/AIDS related health services such as HIV/AIDS testing and treatment for HIV/AIDS, the majority (76.65%) noted that they have no idea where could obtain HIV testing and treatment available. A small minority of respondents (20%) know that the services were available at government hospitals and clinics. This reflects the defective role of Government healthcare services in dissemination of this information in spite of the presence of AIDS. The Government has been implementing various measures but they are not reaching the targeted population. There is an immense need from the side of the government in taking measures which would make the general public aware of HIV/AIDS.

Community responses about HIV/AIDS: All the respondents have expressed that till now there is no any awareness campaign in their locality but a small number of respondents (13%) have attended in AIDS related campaign which was

conducted by school or college. This study observed that awareness campaign was lacking in their locality. Majority of the respondents (73%) have expressed that the need for awareness programmes should be vigorously implemented and have also shown their willingness to attend these programmes. Most of the respondents (93%) told that sex and AIDS education should be introduced in school which will help to prevent HIV/AIDS.

#### Conclusion:

The present study showed a mix picture of HIV/AIDS awareness among urban adults of three towns of Assam, which indirectly points out to the poor awareness among the urban counterparts. This mix response among urban adults is a matter of serious concern and needs to be addressed appropriately through intensive HIV/AIDS awareness campaign in schools, colleges and public places so that the lacuna can be rectified.

## REFERENCES

- Ayranci, U. (2005). AIDS knowledge and attitudes in a Turkish population: an epidemiological study, BMC Public Health, Turkeyunkumar, | www.ipsindia.org | www.naco.com | The Times of India, July, 2010 | - Draft copy of Adolescence Education Programme ,2008 | www.google.co.in | Fact Sheet, World Health Organisation, (2006). | - Taher, E. & Abdelhai, R. (2011). Nurses Knowledge ,perceptions and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS : Effects of a health education intervention on two nursing groups in Cairo University ,Egypt ,Journal of Public Health and Epidemiology Vol. 3(4),PP.144-154 | Saikia, J. P. and Das, R.( 2010). Awareness and Knowledge of HIV/AIDS of women: A Sociological study In an Urbhan Fringe Village of Assam, Journal of the North Eastern Research Bulletin Vol. XIX, Dec. 2010 | Tung WC, Ding K, Farmer S (2008). Knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to HIV and AIDS among college students in Taiwan. J. Assoc. Nurses. AIDS Care, 19: 397-408 | Wong L, Chin CL, Low W, Jaafar N (2008). HIV/AIDS Related Knowledge Among Malaysian Young Adults: Findings From a Nationwide Survey. Medscape J. Med., 10 (6): 148 - 152