

Sexual Behaviour in Rural Northern India: An Insight

Meren Longkumer* Dr S.K.Singh** Dr.H.Lhungdim,***

Introduction

As we all know, sex is usually not an overt discussion in India, but the spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is clearly driven by sexual contacts, that have made it a legitimate topic among the Indian masses. The studies on sexual behaviour in contemporary India have primarily concentrated on the diagnosis and treatment of sexual pathology from psychological or physiological perspective. However, with the advent of AIDS, some non-governmental organizations and academic institutions have initiated studies on sexual behaviour, particularly among groups of people highly vulnerable to HIV infection through sexual relations. Through out the 1990's there has been acceleration in number and quality of studies of sexual behaviour in a variety of location, and the existing state of the information has been summarized in a series of important works Rama. Subban, 1990; Mane and Mitra 1992; Nag, 1996; Pelto, Joshi and Verma 2002. It may be appropriate to mention at the outset that a large proportion of most recent sexual behaviour researchers in India, have emerged owing to a Ford Foundation funded capacity building programme are characterized by their strong focus on qualitative methodology, which they have employed to explore the complex patterns of behaviour and context of sexual activities and other sensitive topics.

The increasing concern over the reported cases of HIV in India demands a study of the pattern of sexual behaviour of its population. For Rural Northern India, the levels of concern shown towards the epidemic were rather low right from the inception of anti-Aids campaigns. This may be ascribed to the relatively low levels of AIDS diagnosis, especially when compared to regions like Western, Southern and Northern-Eastern India. In recent times, however, the number of actual diagnosis, as well as the expressed apprehension by Government and Public Organization over the state of the AIDS epidemic in India, are becoming a matter for concern. When this is combined with the govt. professed knowledge of under-reporting of cases of infection, the reasons behind official apprehension may be better understood. Indeed, it is apparent that the govt. wishes to confront, through education, information and communication (IEC) programmes

*Meren Longkumer, Assistance Research Officer

** Dr S.K.Singh, Reader, Department of Statistical and Mathematical Demography

***Dr.H.Lhungdim, Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health and Mortality

the rate at which HIV has been spreading almost imperceptibly among the population. The effect of such programmes and the investment outlay may be difficult to assess if basic patterns of sexual behaviour before intervention are not ascertained. However, the rural Northern Indian states, that has more than 80% population, such as where Uttar Pradesh is one of the most populated state in India and had a high out-migration to urban places, have less partly covered in most populated state in India and had a high out-migration to urban places, have less partly covered in most of the studies. Despite, Cable Television, ubiquitous in urban places, is rapidly reaching into rural areas. Even in more distant villages people have access to television, in addition to going to cinema houses in the towns. These and other changes and other "modernization" occurring in rural areas having "impacts" on sexual patterns, which is needed to be studied (Verma & Lhungdim, 2002). It is worthwhile to mention that over the years there is a growing concern ever reasons behind low prevalence of the HIV evidence in central as well as northern Indian states. Among other reasons, culture and tradition aggravated differences in the pattern of sexual behaviour in the northern states of India are often quoted as the most important safeguards towards risky sexual behaviour leading to increase potential for STDs/HIV. On the other hand, a number of contemporary studies have focused at the under reporting of the HIV infections, which is primarily rooted in the lower screening/testing of STIs/STDs in the north Indian states, arising out of both lack of facilities as well as culture of conservatism. However, researchers are not unanimous in their verdict behind low prevalence of HIV infection in north India states. Further, looking at the available literature on sexual behaviour and practices, it has been noticed that the focus of the studies are not evenly spread through out the length and breadth of India. More studies have been done in western part of India, namely, in Maharashtra and Gujarat and very few studies have set their locale in northern India. Again most of the studies are mainly confined into urban set ups. And only some sporadic studies have been under taken in rural areas. In this backdrop, the present study makes an effort to shed light on the rural sexual behaviour and patterns in the Northern India. It seems important since there is lack of unanimity among researchers about the possible reasons for relatively low prevalence of HIV cases in this region.

Objectives

- To examine the nature and pattern of sexual behaviour among rural men in North Indian States.
- To explore the various causative and contextual factors associated with premarital and extramarital sexual relationship.

Data and Methodology

The present study makes use of survey data on rural sexual behaviour. The survey was conducted by IIPS as part of the project entitled 'Rural –Sexual Behaviour' in 2001. The study was carried out in two phases. A focused ethnographic work was carried out the first phase followed by representative household survey of 2910 men aged 18-40 years. The data was gathered from 50 villages of five Indian States namely Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka and only men were interviewed. The states were so chosen that it represented east, west, north and south and central part of India. The selected states had more than 80 percent of rural population. For our present study we have taken only three North Indian states, e.g. Haryana, Rajasthan and UP. From each state one district was chosen randomly keeping in view that these districts had more than 80 percent rural population (1991 census) and less than 5 percent of tribal population. From each of the districts ten villages were randomly selected based on the following criteria;

Villages that had less than 5 percent tribal population

Villages that had a population size of more than 500 and

Villages that were at least 5 kms away from the nearest town or any urban centre

The villages in which qualitative work was done in the first phase of the survey were excluded in the quantitative phase.

The present study has thirty villages from three districts namely, Mahendragarh (Haryana), Jalore (Rajasthan) and Jaunpur (UP), one each from the three states. Altogether 1750 men were canvassed structured Interview schedule from the three states namely Haryana (570), Rajasthan (610) and UP (579).

Some of the findings:

- In UP almost 65 percent of the study population belong to the age group of 26-35 whereas it is nearly 15 percent for Haryana and 46 percent for Rajasthan.
- In Rajasthan almost half of the respondents are illiterate and in Haryana, only 7 percent falls in this category.
- Hindus are majority in all three states and the presence of Other Backward Classes in the study sample is too high in all the states and Rajasthan has highest proportion of SC/ST population.
- 70 percent of them in Rajasthan are engaged in agriculture.
- A high proportion of respondent (81%) in UP is engaged in business and other type of economic activities.

- UP being the highest married respondent (96 percent) followed by Haryana 86 percent and Rajasthan 79 percent.
- In nutshell, of all the three states, Rajasthan has high proportion of illiterate, SC/ST, unmarried men and proportion of men working in agriculture compared to other two states.
- Maximum prevalence of masturbation was reported in the age group 18-25, with a percentage of 66.8 and 69.5 in Haryana and U.P. respectively.
- In U.P there is high prevalence of Masturbating at around 66 percent through out the education sector.
- One-fifth of the respondents in Haryana as well as in Rajasthan reported to ever had premarital sexual experience.
- In the age group 18-25 are more likely to experience premarital sex in Haryana as well as in Rajasthan.
- The extra marital sex is also common among young men in the age-group Of 18-25 in all the states.
- The pattern seems to have reversed in Rajasthan where the reported prevalence of extra marital sexual relationship has been the highest among SC/STs.
- Among the three northern states prevalence of extra marital relationship is found highest in Haryana (13 percent) followed by Rajasthan (10 percent) and Uttar Pradesh (6 percent).
- In the 18-25 age group maximum prevalence of visiting commercial sex workers was found in Haryana, which was 5.1 percent when Uttar Pradesh showed the least prevalence of 2.6 among the three states.
- The percentage of men who ever had sex with CSWs was 4 among the men of Rajasthan.
- In the next age group, that is 26-35, UP stands with highest prevalence of visiting commercial sex workers 8.8 per cent while it is 5.8 for in the case of Haryana and Rajasthan is in the middle with a prevalence of 2.5 percent. Among the respondents of age thirty and above there is marginal difference in the case of Haryana and Rajasthan (5.6 and 5.9 respectively) while for UP it is more than double (13 percent) compared other two states.
- While we examine the case of men with more than secondary education it varies from 5.1 percent of Haryana to 8 percent in UP and Rajasthan with a 7.7 percent.
- Hindus has the prevalence of visiting commercial sex workers is 8.1 percent in UP followed by Haryana with 5.3 percent and then Rajasthan with 3.6 percent. The SC/ST of

UP displays the highest prevalence among the SC/ST respondents across the states followed by Haryana and then Rajasthan (4.3 and 3.4 respectively). Among OBC, prevalence goes hand in hand in case of Haryana and UP (5.4 and 5.6) while in Rajasthan it is little less (4.1 percent).

Logistics regression represents the result of two models, in the form of odds ratio. In model I, the dependent variable is men who experienced premarital sex and Model II was experience of extramarital sex. These two variables are coded as 0 and 1 where 0 represents those men who are not experiencing whereas 1 represents those men who are experiencing, the explanatory variables are same in both model.

In model I only age and ever had alcohol found significantly affect with pre marital sex in the Model II there are number of variables come significant with extra marital sex. Age significantly affect. Age significantly affects the extra marital sex of experiencing extramarital sex but experiencing extramarital sex in 18-25 age group of men is more as compared to premarital sex. The experiencing extramarital sex is 2.74 times more likely than those are who exposed to blue film as compared to who do not have experience for the same. Men who intoxicated, the odds of experiencing premarital sex is 1.72 times more likely as compared to their counterparts who had not had alcohol. Taking of alcohol does not contribute significantly in the experience of extramarital sex. The main difference in the determinants of premarital sex and extramarital sex is that taking of alcohol contribute significantly in the experience of premarital sex. One of the reasons may be that the married people are socially free to watch blue film, in the India situation.