

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Completed Studies

Perceptions of patients on routine referral of TB patients for HIV testing - A study from south India

(Funded by Central TB Division, New Delhi)

Summary

TB patients living in HIV high prevalence areas in India have been offered HIV testing since early 2008. This study described the findings of a pilot project, focusing on understanding patients' perspectives on the process of referral for HIV testing and the problems encountered. This was a cross-sectional study conducted in 2 districts. Government health staff were trained to assess the HIV status of all TB cases and refer all persons with unknown HIV status to the nearest HIV counseling and testing centre free of cost.

Of the 568 patients, who were interviewed, 455 (80%) reported being referred for HIV testing after they presented to the TB clinic for investigations or for treatment of TB. Of the 110 HIV-infected patients interviewed, 89 (81%) were referred to the ART centre and 82 (92%) actually went to the ART centre, despite the distance to the testing centres and financial difficulties. Patients expressed problems with regard to frequent visits.

This study provided the first evidence from India that routine, provider-initiated voluntary HIV testing of TB patients can be achieved with very high efficiency under programmatic conditions.

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A situational analysis of health seeking behavior and awareness of tuberculosis among migrants – Brick kiln workers - A study from Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu, India

[Funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the WHO under the Model DOTS Project]

Migration has been an important phenomenon in managing public health issues as migrants find it difficult to access various health care programmes. This

phenomenon has been a challenge to the TB control programme also. During the survey conducted by TRC in the Model DOTS area, it was evident that there were many temporary migrants in this area, which included brick kiln chamber workers, seasonal farm workers, construction workers and lay workers. Among them, majority however were brick kiln workers. Since the brick kiln chambers are situated on the outskirts of the main villages and towns, accessibility to health care becomes extremely difficult for the brick kiln workers.

There is a dearth of information on the prevalence of TB among the brick kiln workers, their awareness of the disease, and the health seeking behaviour of chest symptomatics. A qualitative situational analysis of this group was undertaken in Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu during March-June 2008 to understand the profile of brick kiln workers, such as their background, access to health care, general health seeking behaviour especially related to TB. One hundred and seventy brick kilns were randomly selected.

The study findings highlighted some of the challenges faced by the brick kiln workers with regard to their health, health seeking behaviour and access to health care services. The nature of their occupation, with exposure to heat and dust for long hours, makes them particularly vulnerable to respiratory illnesses. The public sector health facilities were open during the day when the brick kiln workers were at work in the chambers which made it difficult for them to access health care. To solve these problems, the brick kiln owners were linked with the local private health facilities. This limited the possibility of the workers receiving proper health management. The public sector health providers expressed difficulties in providing care to this group of migrant workers, especially if they presented with symptoms related to TB, that demanded further investigation. The availability of smear microscopy services only at the main PHC, which is usually at a considerable distance from the chambers, led to long delays in investigations, diagnosis, and patients not reporting back to collect their results and initiating TB treatment, if required. The provision of DOTS services once again became a challenge due to the temporary nature of the workers' jobs in one place.

This study has provided an initial insight into the challenges faced by brick kiln workers in terms of access to care. It also brings out the constraints faced by health providers in TB management among this group. However, this is a preliminary report and provides the background for a more detailed quantitative study on the number of chest symptomatics among brick kiln workers, health seeking behaviour among chest symptomatics, awareness of TB among workers and the owners, prevalence of TB among brick kiln workers and TB management.

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Community-based approach in designing an AIDS program for HIV-positive mothers in India

(Collaboration with UCLA - University of Los Angeles, USA)

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and needs of mothers living with HIV to gain greater insights into the challenges they face in relation to their health seeking behavior, fears around disclosure, and issues related to stigma and discrimination. This qualitative study utilized focus groups consisting of a sample of 60 HIV-infected mothers recruited from a large maternity hospital and State TB Demonstration clinic in Chennai, India. The study participants expressed discrimination by physicians and other health care workers a major impediment in accessing quality health care. Mothers living with HIV were increasingly concerned about how and when to disclose their HIV status to their children, and the repercussions which could result upon disclosure. The findings of this study call for intervention strategies, taking into consideration the various concerns and needs of mothers living with HIV and their children.

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**A study of the care seeking behaviour of persons with chest symptoms from rural and urban areas in Tamil Nadu after implementation of the RNTCP
[Funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the WHO under the Model DOTS Project]**

Summary

The TB control programme is based on passive case finding. It is therefore crucial to understand the health care seeking behaviour of chest symptomatics (CSs). In 1997, prior to the implementation of the RNTCP, a community based study of the care seeking behaviour of the CSs from urban and rural areas in Tamil Nadu was carried out. This care seeking behaviour of urban and rural populations following implementation of RNTCP was examined in the present study using the same methodology. The aim of the study was to compare the care seeking behaviour of CSs, type of health providers they approached, the factors that influence the choice of providers before and after the implementation of the RNTCP. In addition, information was collected on the knowledge of TB.

The prevalence of CSs in urban and rural areas was 2.7% and 4.9% respectively. Prevalence was found to increase with age. The percentage of CSs living in urban and rural areas, reporting to the private care facilities as their first point of contact were 58.7% and 41.3% respectively, and of those who utilized Government facility was 36% and 64% respectively; these differences were highly significant. The salient findings of this study were that, after implementation of the RNTCP, the number of CSs reporting to the private care facilities initially has been reduced and persons seeking care in the Government facility has significantly increased. It was also encouraging to note that 69% of the rural respondents as compared to 61% of urban respondents were aware that treatment for TB was available close to their residence. However, the fact that among those who approached Government facilities, only a quarter of respondents opted for repeat visits to the government clinics and shifted to private care or other alternative systems of medicine is a matter of concern. Dissatisfaction with health providers was the main reason for the shift in care provider. The findings call for strengthening the revised control program keeping in mind these issues.

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Pediatric disclosure: Family caregiver's perceptions on disclosure of HIV infection to children living with HIV

Summary

With the introduction of ART and frequent visits to the ART clinics, many caregivers are facing the challenge of whether and how to disclose the HIV status to their children living with HIV. A cross-sectional study was undertaken in which 65 caregivers of 95 HIV-infected children registered in two pediatric clinical studies at TRC from 2000 to 2007 participated. About 88% of the caregivers had not disclosed to the child that he/she was infected with HIV. Nearly three quarters of the respondents said that they would disclose when the child was older, and were of the opinion that the best age for disclosure of HIV diagnosis to children was between 12 and 15 years. A majority of care givers requested help with regard to disclosure. The findings call for intervention strategies in care givers with regard to disclosure of HIV status to their children.

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Ongoing studies

Addressing psychosocial needs and HIV risk in men who have sex with men in India

(Collaboration with Harvard Medical School/MGH and Fenway Community Health)

(Funded by Indo-US Joint Working group)

Men who have sex with men (MSM) in India are a marginalized population who are in need of evidence based HIV prevention efforts. MSMs are considered "bridge" populations, where wives of MSMs, clients of sex workers, patients with sexually transmitted diseases and partners of drug users, over a time period, "bridge" the virus from highest risk groups to the general population. Our initial study on the behavioural risk factors among 210 MSMs provided a background that is relevant to the conduct of the present study. The innovativeness of this study is that it explores the possibility of providing an intervention which targets

psychosocial problems concurrent with HIV risk reduction behaviours among the MSM population.

Aims

- To develop a behavioural prevention intervention for MSMs in Chennai
- To conduct a randomized controlled study on the intervention in MSMs in Chennai with an outcome of risky sexual behaviour

This project will help to develop a model for an effective holistic intervention for MSMs, which will be contextual and culture specific. In addressing these concerns it is expected that attempts can be made towards reduction in HIV transmission.

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Perceptions of HIV-positive individuals on disclosure of their HIV status to their children

With the introduction of ART and the need for life long treatment, HIV-infected parents are faced with the biggest challenge on how to disclose their (parents) HIV status to their children.

There is some evidence that HIV disclosure, though stressful, facilitates emotional support which may lead to more effective coping and enhanced psychological adaptation. However the fear of stigma and discrimination faced by the children of PLHAs (people living with HIV/AIDS) may inhibit parents from disclosing their HIV status to their children and others.

It is against this background that this cross sectional study was carried out covering PLHAs attending the out patient TRC clinics after obtaining their consent. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. One hundred and ten patients were recruited and interviewed. The analysis of the study is in progress.

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A study on sexual behaviour among sero-discordant individuals

There is dearth of information in India on sexual behavior and sexual risk factors among HIV sero-discordant couples. Hence a study was undertaken to understand the sexual behaviour patterns and sexual risk factors for HIV transmission which would be useful for health care providers in dealing with this group of individuals. This qualitative study aimed to explore sexual behaviour patterns among sero-discordant individuals. In-depth interviews were conducted among eligible patients after obtaining their consent. Patients were recruited from outpatient clinics of TRC and TRC subcentres at Government hospitals in Chennai and Vellore. Eighty five interviews have been conducted and analysis of the study data is in progress.

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