

# The attitude and perception of truck drivers screened for HIV virus to HIV/AIDS in a South West LGA in Nigeria

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## Abstract

**Objective:** Truck drivers especially those exposed to long periods of absence from the home environment are more susceptible to HIV/AIDS than the general populace. This study is to determine the level of awareness and attitude of truck drivers to HIV/AIDS in the south west of Nigeria. **Materials and Methods:** A total of 100 long distance truck drivers were enrolled in this study employing the snowballing method. Previously verified questionnaires were administered by trained counsellors after the drivers were screened for HIV antibody. This was done using three different types of reagents. Determine (Lot No 51289K100), UNI-GOLD (Lot No HIV2110076) and Stat-Pak (Lot No HIV031313). **Results:** Two percent were found to be HIV positive. It was found that awareness was high enough among them, 77% agreed to be familiar with HIV/AIDS. Majority of them obtained most of the information from the radio (55%). Condom use was low among all the respondents. Only 14% agreed to using condoms for every sexual encounter while 28% did not use condoms at all. The most aware were in the 40-49 year age group. **Conclusion:** There is need to improve condom use among this group of workers. Increased exposure and awareness to formal programmes aimed at prevention is urgently needed. There is also urgent need to increase the frequency of condom use.

**Keywords:** Sex, HIV AIDS, Truck Drivers, Condoms, Prevention

## INTRODUCTION

Following the isolation of the HIV virus by Gallo et al., 1984 and its established link to AIDS (Popovic et al., 1984), it has been widely accepted that there are at risk groups and sub-groups of individuals who through their life style activities, occupation and recreational habits are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than the general population. These include homosexuals, men who have sex with men (MSM), intravenous drugs users, commercial sex workers (CSW) and in the early phase of the infection haemophiliacs who received blood components not screened for HIV (Qian et al., 2005) (unscreened blood for transfusion). Vertical transmission from mother to child is also an important route of transmission.

However there are other fringe at risk sub-populations who also due to occupation/life style are more susceptible to HIV infection. Such includes construction (migrant) (Qian et al., 2005) workers who live in hostels and spend long periods away from their spouses at a time and also truck drivers (Mishra et al., 2005; Villarinho et al., 2002) who due to the demands and nature of their job also spend long periods away from their spouses. Though since the introduction of

highly active antiretroviral treatment (HAART) the diagnosis of HIV/AIDS has no longer been a death sentence as it once was, it has also been accepted that prevention is still very vital in the management of patients with this disease with particular emphasis on identified at risk groups. To this end it is important to identify all at risk groups and make prevention a vital aspect of their management.

Truck drivers are social group at risk of infection in most settings and have been described in Nigeria and other parts of the world. The long periods of absence from home and hence the spouse increases the probability that multiple extramarital sexual activities or sex with a person other than the 'significant other' will occur predisposing to HIV infection.

Similar studies carried out in other parts of the world have revealed that this group of people are indeed more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS (Villarinho et al., 2002). In Brazil it was found that long periods away from home was not the only factor responsible for this increased susceptibility (Villarinho et al., 2002). Other factors such as condom use and alcohol intake played a significant role. This was also the case in a study carried out in India where it was well established in a study that the behaviour and perceptions of the truck drivers made them more susceptible to HIV/AIDS including alcohol intake. In this study it was also found that the truck drivers also had misconceptions about the transmission of HIV/AIDS including it being transmitted through shaking hands and sharing food (Singh and Joshi., 2012).

In Iran it was found that this sub-population of at risk groups had minimal knowledge of HIV/AIDS and condom use was less than satisfactory (Ramezani et al., 2008), both factors collaborating to making them more susceptible to HIV infection than the general mainstream population. Considering the vital impact this job has on the economic and other services of the country, it is important to make a continuous assessment of these people viz-a-viz their knowledge and attitude towards HIV and AIDS. This has been done with a view to improving and maintaining the health status of this workforce.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The snowballing method was employed in gathering the individual drivers together. Due to the nature of the population under study a respondent-driven sampling variant was used involving one hundred (100) truck drivers in the local government area under study (LGA).

### Setting

The study would be carried out in Osogbo the capital city of Osun state in Nigeria. It has an urban setting with a population of 3,416,959. The residents are majorly Yoruba however there are other tribes including Hausas, Igbos and those of Edo state origin. The weather is typically tropical with periods of heavy rain fall alternating with the dry season. All participants would be counselled on the proper use of condoms after the questionnaire might have been administered. The questionnaire had been pretested and verified in the ART clinic at Asubiaro hospital in Osogbo.

### Inclusion Criteria

- 1) Confirmed member of truck drivers association
- 2) Driver gives voluntary consent to be included in the study
- 3) Those who voluntarily agree to be screened for HIV

### Exclusion criteria

- 1) Non member of the truck drivers association
- 2) Denies consent to be included in the study
- 3) Those who refuse to be screened for HIV

## RESULTS

Of the 100 drivers 98% were male and only 2% female. The majority were in the 50-59 age bracket. Only 7% were above 60 years of age.

Marital status revealed that only 53% were married, while 13% were divorced and 22% single. 10% though single had

casual sex partners. The majority of respondents (36%) had been in employment for over 15 years, while 31% had been in employment for only less than five years. Fourteen percent (14%) agreed to using condoms for every sexual encounter, while 41% used condoms only occasionally and 28% did not use condoms at all. Seventy seven percent (77%) admitted to knowing what HIV/Aids is while the remaining 23% denied any knowledge of the virus. The majority (55%) heard about the virus from the radio, while 25% heard about the disease through family and friends. Only 10% agreed to hearing it from outreach groups. Thirty four percent (34%) believed the disease is a myth however 69% believed that the disease exists. Fifty nine percent believed that it was a sexually transmitted disease while 17% were not sure of how the virus was transmitted. Forty one percent of the respondents believed that the nature of their job made them more vulnerable to HIV infection while 19% said there was no association and the remaining 40% did not know.

The results revealed that of those that are married 44% agreed to knowing what HIV /Aids was while of those divorced only 10% claimed to know what HIV/AIDS was all about. Of those that were single but had casual sex partners, only 6% claimed to know what HIV/AIDS is. Those in the 50-59 years age group had the highest percentage (24%) of those who knew what HIV/AIDS is, while only 10% below thirty years of age claimed to know what HIV/Aids is. Out of those who used condoms for every sexual encounter only 4% believed that their job would make them more vulnerable to HIV/Aids, while for those who occasionally used condoms 18% believed that their job would increase exposure to HIV infection. Those who used condoms occasionally 17% believed that they were more at risk while of those who used condoms for every sexual encounter 8% felt they were more at risk for HIV infection. Those who did not use condoms at all (22%) were sure HIV was a sexually transmitted disease. Only 2% of this population tested positive for HIV, and both were males.

## DISCUSSION

Truck drivers due to the nature of their job are at higher risk for HIV infection than the general population. However epidemiological and other data may vary from one environment to another. In this study only 2% of the participants were found to be positive for HIV, which is lower than the national prevalence. This is comparable to findings of Atilola et al. (2010) also in south west Nigeria who reported a prevalence of 2.4%. However prevalence rates as high as 26% have been reported in South Africa (Delany-Moretwe et al., 2014). This rather wide disparity could be explained by the fact that South Africa already has the highest prevalence rates of HIV world wide (Piot, 2000) and it follows that nearly all if not all sectors of the society would reflect high prevalence rates. Nevertheless it should be mentioned that prevalence rates lower than national values have also been reported in other regions such as Brazil which reported HIV prevalence among its truck drivers as low as 0.3% (Pinho et al., 2011). Those found to be HIV positive in our group were in the 50-59 year age group (6.4%) (Figure 1), this group was also found to have the highest number of respondents. In a similar study carried out in the Delta region of Nigeria a prevalence rate of 7.4% was obtained among this age group (Azuonwu et al., 2011). This could be due to the high and sustained sexual activity among this age group of drivers. And also the similar rates could be explained by the fact that both studies were conducted in similar environments. It should be noted that those who tested positive have been enrolled in our HIV prevention and treatment programme.

Forty one (41%) (Figure 2) percent of the respondents believed that their job placed them at higher risk for HIV infection than the general population. This is slightly lower than what obtained in a similar study carried out in the same sub-region of Nigeria where 68.1% of the subjects agreed to be at higher risk (Atilola et al., 2010). It is interesting to note that of those who believed they were more at risk 39.0% admitted to not using condoms at all, while only 9.7% used protection for every sexual encounter.

Twenty eight(28%) percent of respondents reported not using condoms at all, this is much lower than what was obtained in a study carried out in a similar region among drivers almost twenty years ago in which 60% reported unwillingness to using condoms(Araoye et al., 1996). This is very encouraging and reflects how far we have come in engaging men to use condoms since the AIDS epidemic was reported in the early eighties. However there is further need to improve rates of condom use as prevention is an integral part of any HIV/AIDS treatment programme.

Awareness of HIV/AIDS among the drivers was high (77%), though not as high as that found in studies carried out by Aniebue et al.(2011) who found an awareness rate of over 90%. In this study the media was the main source of information about HIV, which is also similar to our findings (Figure 3) where the radio was the main source of information. Though it has been suggested that of all the various sections that comprise the mass media the newspapers are most effective at disseminating information (Jung et al., 2013). All our respondents (100%) were willing to be screened for HIV where as in other studies this figure is much lower (Araoye et al., 1996). This could be due to the time factor as other studies cited were carried out as far back as 2011, revealing that this group of people are more aware and there has been a positive change in attitude towards the idea of being screened for HIV/AIDS virus.

Indeed in some studies the consent rate was below 40% (Atilola et al., 2010).

Relationship analysis revealed that 53% of the respondents were married while 22% were single and 13% divorced. Marital status is an important variable because it has been recorded in studies carried out in Malawi that using fixed-effects regression, it was found that getting married coincides with a significant attitudinal shift regarding the acceptability of condom use within marriage that cannot be explained by differences in fertility status or selection into marriage alone. In addition, it was also found that, for women, perceived HIV status of the respondent and spouse generally had greater influence than actual HIV status on the acceptability of condom use within marriage and actual condom use with a spouse or steady partner, even after HIV status is known; while actual HIV status and HIV risk behaviours are generally more important among men.

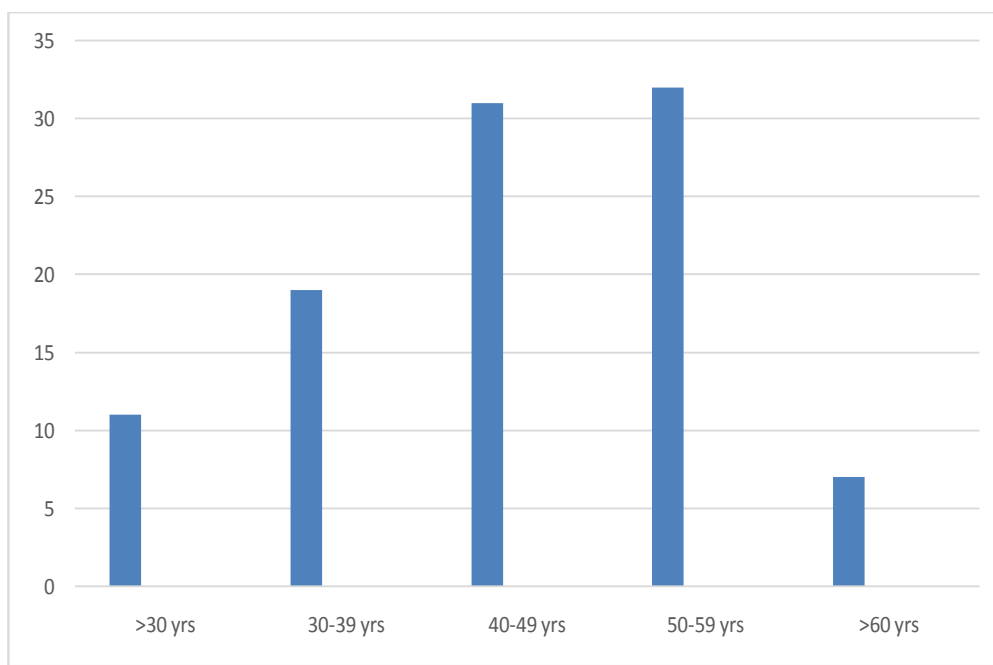


Figure 1. Chart Revealing the Age Bracket (50-59) With HIV Positive truck Drivers

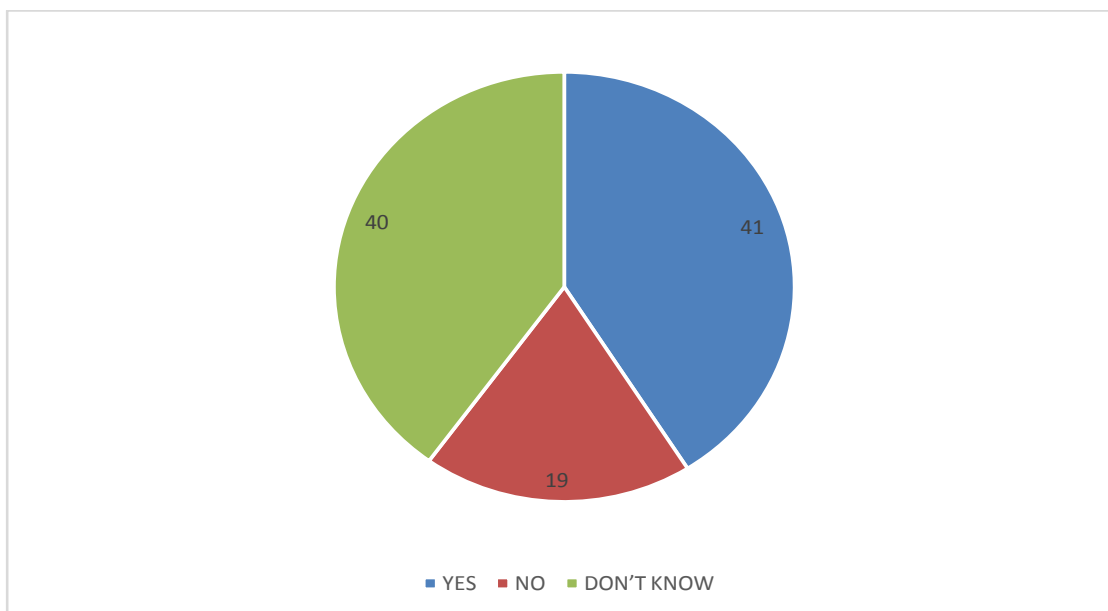
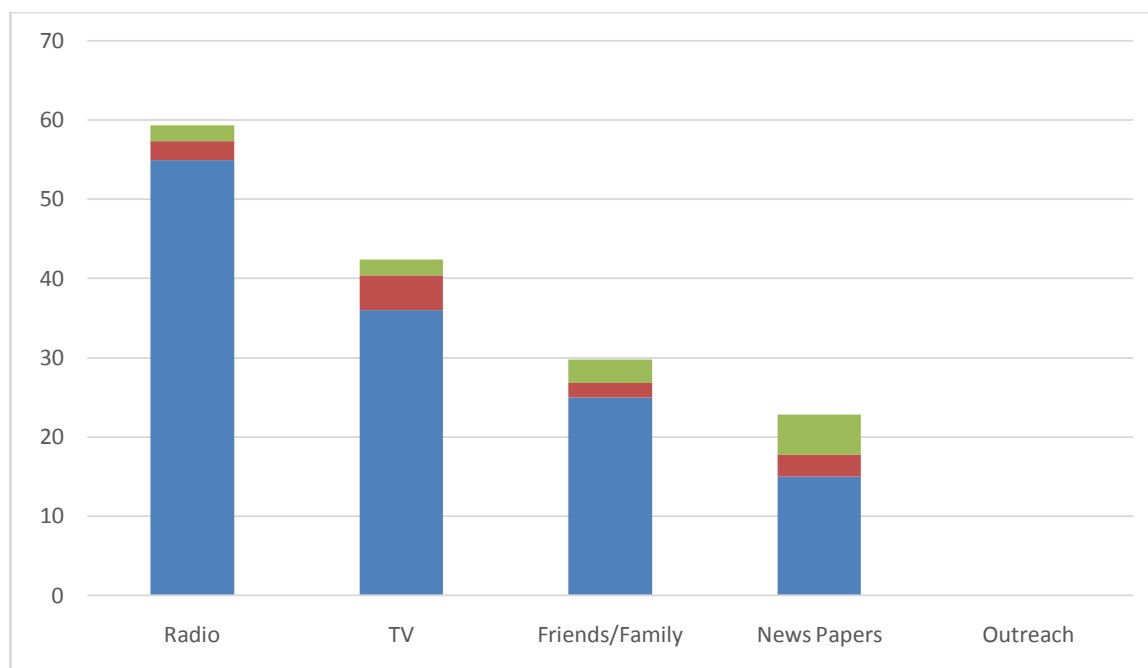


Figure 2. Chart Showing Those Who Believe the Job Is a predisposing factor



**Figure 3.** Chart Showing the Source of Awareness of HIV/AIDS

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## CONCLUSION

The prevalence rate of HIV among this group of truck drivers is low. However it is still very necessary to increase condom use to an optimum level as this group of people are highly mobile and remain vulnerable. Further exposure to formal and regular prevention programmes is desirable. The study generally shows an improvement in attitude towards HIV/AIDS and may be in part responsible for the drop in incidence of HIV/AIDS in recently released figures for the state.

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