

Understanding the gender disparity in HIV testing in India

Mayank kumar singh ¹

The existence and rapid spread of HIV and AIDS poses a serious challenge to every nation across the globe. HIV and AIDS have the potential to undermine the massive improvements that have been made in global health over the years. However, the programme of controlling HIV epidemic has underwent tremendous change from Using data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2005-06), we examine the state level differences in gender disparities in HIV testing across major India states. We also examine the effect of salient socio-economic, demographic and behavioral correlates of gender disparities in HIV testing in India. Result indicates large inter-state differentials in HIV testing in India. The use of HIV testing remained notably lower among females than their male counterparts. We also found systematic socioeconomic pattern in HIV testing, as men and women from richest wealth quintile, higher education from urban area were most benefitted than their counterparts.

ABSTRACT

Context- The existence and rapid spread of HIV and AIDS poses a serious challenge to every nation across the globe. HIV and AIDS have the potential to undermine the massive improvements that have been made in global health over the years. Apart from a being a serious health problem, the multi layered effects of the epidemic on the socio-economic fabric of whole nations, makes HIV and AIDS a potential development threat worldwide. As on January 2006, the Joint United Nation program on HIV /AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that AIDS has killed more than 25 million people since it was first recognized on December 1, 1981. It is estimated that about .6% of world's population is infected with HIV.

In Indian context, there is a growing concern of this epidemic as it was estimated by National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) that around 5 million people were living in India with HIV. But the recent estimates from a national household based survey data led to a major revision of the estimated prevalence of HIV in India and suggested that around 2.4 million people in India are living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2008).

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

- (1) To examine the gender difference in HIV testing in India and major states.

¹ Mayank Kumar Singh, Senior Research Officer, International Institute for Population Sciences (I.I.P.S.), G.S. Road, Deonar, Mumbai-400088; Email: singhmkgobhu@gmail.com;

- (2) To examine the gender differences in HIV testing according to selected socio- economic, demographic and behavioral characteristics in India.
- (3) To analyze the gender differential in knowledge of place of HIV testing by selected background characteristics of respondents in India
- (4) To study the gender differences in voluntarily acceptance of HIV testing in India.
- (5) To identify the determinants of HIV testing and knowledge of any source of HIV testing among male and female in India.

Data & Methods: The data for present study has been drawn from National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06). The NFHS-3 collected the information from a nationally representative sample of 1, 09, 041 households with 1,24,385 women in the reproductive age group 15-49 and 74,369 men aged 15-54 years.

Bi-variate and multivariate analysis (binary logistic regression analysis) has been applied to fulfill the objectives of the present study. The dependent variables in the analysis are: ever had done HIV test, and knowledge of place of HIV testing. The independent variables are: age of the respondent, place of residence, educational status, regular media exposure, marital status, currently residing with spouse, work status in last 12 months, religion, wealth quintile and caste of the respondents. Other than that the comprehensive knowledge of HIV/ AIDS preventive methods, comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted disease in last 12 months, risky sexual behaviour are also treated as independent variable in the analysis

Findings and conclusions

This study has made an attempt first time in India to show the extent of HIV testing among females and males and also highlights the significant predictors of HIV testing both at national and sub national levels of urban area. Analysis gives an indication that the extent of HIV testing is lower among females in most of the states. Only South Indian states, along with Maharashtra, Delhi, Manipur, and Sikkim are performing better in terms of HIV testing for females.

The extent of testing among female and male widely differed according to their age, place of residence, mass media exposure, household economic status and their work status as well. The extent of HIV testing among women is found to relatively higher among those who had correct comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS and the associated preventive measures as well. It was also observed that knowledge of any place of HIV testing was comparatively lower among females than males, but across the states Maharashtra is performing better in terms of knowledge of females' for place of HIV testing than among other states in India.

Other factors like individual's age, educational status, exposure to mass media and the comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS affect positively in terms of knowledge of place of HIV testing for females as well as males. Finding also suggest that in the recent course of HIV testing, females are doing better than the males as more proportion of female went for HIV testing in last 12 months compared to males.

These findings suggests that although the extent of HIV testing was lower among females but the more younger, educated and those who were belonging to economically better off household are accepting the HIV testing more openly. From policy point of view it is important to

formulate the policies and subsequent interventions focusing on those women who are still behind in HIV testing like, older women, belonging to rural areas, uneducated, and from poor families, in order to make the nation more protected from the growing danger of HIV epidemic.