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Access to Mass Media and Awareness of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) Among the Truck Drivers in Dhaka City: Do Mass Media Make Them Aware?

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Abstract

The major objective of the study is to determine the association between access to mass media such as television, newspaper, radio and internet and level of STDs awareness among the truck drivers in Dhaka city. This research utilized purposive sampling technique to select 250 respondents from the study areas. The results of the study demonstrate that a significant number of respondents (88%) had heard of STDs. However, most of them (70%) did not have the awareness of STDs. It again reveals that radio, newspaper and internet did not play significant role in making them aware of STDs. Bivariate results of the study indicate that respondents with higher degree of exposure to television were more likely to be aware of STD like HIV. This study concludes that mass media may play vibrant role in disseminating information about not only HIV but also other STDs such as Chlamydia, Herpes, Hepatitis B and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

Keywords: STDs, awareness, truck drivers, mass media

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1. Introduction

Extant studies on truck drivers suggest that long distance truck drivers have become one of the main vectors in the transmission of STDs globally (Abbasi, Rafique, Aziz, & Hussain, 2013; KMCC Uganda, 2014; McCree et al., 2010; Morris, & Ferguson, 2007; Prajapati, & Sanjel, 2014). Their role in the transmission of STDs is deep-seated not only in their way of life that comes with the profession but also in the broader social and economic factors. Truck drivers move one place to another very frequently and stay away from their families for a longer period of time. "Their need for entertainment and female companionship make them very likely to use the services of Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) in major transportation routes" (Kumar, 2012, p.169). Thus, frequent migration and mobility of truck drivers facilitates to get in touch with commercial sexual networks (Chen et al., 2012; Deane, Parkhurst, & Johnston, 2010).

A growing body of researches on long distance truck drivers indicates that they have low STDs knowledge, have higher reported rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (Chen et al., 2006; Morris, & Ferguson, 2007), have intercourse with multiple, regular and commercial partners when they are on the road (Bhalla, Somasundaram, Bhalla, & Singh, 2005; Morris, & Ferguson, 2007), report low consistent condom use (Abdullah, Ebrahim, Fielding, & Morisky, 2004; Gibney, Saquib, Metzger, 2003; Matovu, & Ssebadduka, 2012), involve in unlawful activities like drug use (Gibney, Saquib, Metzger, 2003; Morris, & Ferguson, 2007; Valway, Jenison, Keller, Vega-Hernandez, & McCree, 2009), thereby suffering from STDs (Matovu, & Ssebadduka, 2012). Against these backdrops, mass media have been used as an important instrument to combat STDs in the developing world over the couple of decades (Agarwal, & de Araujo, 2014; Bedford, 2010; Catalán-Matamoros, 2011; Liskin, 1990; Myhre, June, & Flora, 2000; Romer et al., 2009; Wakefield, Loken, & Hornik, 2010).

Again, a number of studies on mass media and STDs show that different modes of mass communication played pivotal role in disseminating STDs knowledge (Bertrand, O'Reilly, Denison, Anhang, & Sweat, 2006; Myhre, June, & Flora, 2000). For example, modes of media namely radio, television and newspaper have been used effectively to communicate STDs messages among the general population in the countries of Africa for creating awareness of STDs (Bessinger, Katende, & Gupta, 2004; Darteh, 2013; Keating, Meekers, & Adewuyi, 2006). In our neighboring countries like India and Nepal, mass media played a pioneering role in disseminating awareness about transmission of STDs and reducing misconceptions about HIV/AIDS (Khatti, 2015; Singh, Singh, & Singh, n.d.; Sood, Shefner-Rogers, & Sengupta, 2006; Yadav, Makwana, Vadera, Dhaduk, & Gandha, 2011). In Nepal, the most common source of knowledge regarding STDs was television (70.27%), ranking the first, followed by banner/posters (32.09%), newspapers (30.41%), doctors (19.59%) and radio (12.16%) (Chaudhary, Nagargoje, Kubde, Bhardwaj, & Singh, 2011).

In Bangladesh, some studies were conducted on mass media and awareness of STDs. For instance, Hossain, Mani, Sidik, Shahar, & Islam (2014) accomplished a study on the married women in Bangladesh. The results of their study demonstrated that a significant proportion of the respondents ((70.6%)) have knowledge and awareness of STDs. Similarly, Huda, & Amanullah (2013) conducted a study among the secondary school students and found that 36.98% of them had very good knowledge of HIV and other STDs. The crucial reason of higher degree of awareness about STDs is that most of the respondents were educated in their studies. Likewise, Mondal, Islam, Rahman, Rahman, & Hoque (2012) found that more than four-fifths of the participants were knowledgeable about HIV. The study also identified some predictors of HIV knowledge, including educational status, contraceptive use, radio program, TV program, and HIV workshop.

From the above evidences, though not enough, it is clear that no study as yet has been conducted among the truck drivers in Bangladesh to show the nexus between awareness of STDs and role of mass media. The present study, therefore, has been undertaken to fill up the gap and to show the linkages between the role of mass media and awareness of STDs among the truck drivers of Dhaka city. The findings in this study will help contribute to the research literature on the association between access to mass media and awareness of STDs. Thus, it may help other researchers, policy makers and those involved in conducting researches on mass media and STDs.

2. Methods

2.1 Study Area and Participants

The study was conducted in three truck terminals in Dhaka city, namely Gabtoli, Sayedabad and Tejgaon. A total of 250 people took part in this study. The participants were truck drivers who drove trucks across the country. The mean age for the sample participants was 33.81 years with a standard deviation of 8.37. Each participant had a minimum of one-year experience in truck driving prior to participating in this study. The investigators initially addressed all participating truck drivers and explained the objectives of the study, taking care to emphasize that it was a group health survey and was not intended as an evaluation of individual truck drivers. Therefore, all respondents voluntarily attended in this study.

2.2 Survey Instrument

In this study, an anonymous structured questionnaire was used for assessing truck drivers' socio-demographic profile, access to mass media and their awareness of STDs. The structured questionnaire contained 38 questions, with three sections. Some questions had multiple options from which respondents were asked to provide more than one possible answers. The

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questionnaire was prepared after an extensive literature review had been completed. Before finalizing the questionnaire, meticulous attention was paid to the wording and placement of each question. The questionnaire was printed both in English and Bangla Language. It took 12-15 minutes to carry out each interview.

2.3 Sampling Design

Purposive sampling design was undertaken to select 250 truck drivers in this study. We applied this sampling method, because it was difficult for us to construct a sampling frame consisting of a complete list of truck drivers. Again, we know that purposive (i.e. non-probability) sampling is generally chosen to conduct surveys among marginalized and hard-to-reach populations like street children and truck drivers, however, the desired sample must be picked out employing the principles of random process (Faugier, & Sargeant, 1997; Bailey, 1988; Ennew, 1994).

2.4 Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software, version 22. The analysis was done at two stages: descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses. In this study, descriptive statistics were used to examine the participants' socio-demographic characteristics, access to mass media and awareness of STDs. The scores on the socio-demographic characteristics, access to mass media and awareness of STDs were in frequency and percentage form of categorized responses. In the process of analysis, relationships supporting or refusing the pre-formulated hypothesis were subjected to statistical tests of significance. Test statistics like Cramer's V and Chi-square were used to measure the magnitude/strength of relationships among the variables.

2.5 Ethical Issues

Ethical issue is the core thing of the integrity of any research. Researchers have moral and legal responsibility to comply with ethical principles so that they can engage in discussion about the issues (Curtis, & Curtis, 2011). In the current study, informed consent was obtained from all participants and no personal identifier was recorded on the questionnaires. Moreover, respondents had the right to discontinue interview at any time during the period of survey. Overall, privacy was safely maintained throughout the total data collection procedure.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio-demographic Profile of Truck Drivers

In this study, a total of 250 truck drivers completed the study questionnaire. Findings of the study reveal that the mean age of truck drivers was 33.81 years with a standard deviation of 8.37. Again, 38.40 percent of the truck drivers were less than 30 years of age, 41.60 percent were between 30-40 years and 20 percent of them were more than 40 years of age. Around three-fourths of the study participants were married and a whopping 96.80 percent of them were the followers of Islam. Education was one of the important determinants of awareness of STDs. However, the findings of the current study demonstrate that a little more than one-fourths of the truck drivers were illiterate, 32 percent could read and write only and 41.60 percent of them completed primary level education. Professional experience of the truck drivers shows that more than half of the respondents (53.60%) had over 10 years of driving experience and 50.60 percent participants replied that they stayed in hotel/boarding at night. With regard to income, the results of the current study display that sharp four-fifths of them earned more than 10,000 taka monthly. These socio-demographic findings of the current study were moderately consistent with those of the studies conducted by Bryan, Fisher, & Benziger, (2001); Gibney et al., (2003) and McCree et al., (2010) in India, Bangladesh and the USA respectively.

3.2 Truck Drivers' Access to Mass Media

One of the important objectives of the current study was to assess truck drivers' access to mass media including television, newspaper, radio and internet since mass media have a significant educational role in creating awareness of STDs among respondents (Khattri, 2015; Mondal, Rahman, Rahman, & Akter, 2012; Li et al., 2009). In this study, respondents were asked whether they read newspaper, watch television, listen to radio and have access to internet. Readership of newspaper and viewership of TV counted on the availability of, and access to, those either at bus/truck terminal or at boarding/hotel.

The findings of the study revealed that 33% respondents read newspapers and magazines sometimes. Newspapers and magazines readership was sharply higher among the educated respondents. In terms of watching television, an overwhelming 89 percent respondent reported that they watched television at times. In the same vein, respondents with higher level of income watched television more compared to those who had lower level of income. These findings were in line with those of the studies carried out by Huda, & Amanullah (2013) and Khattri (2015). Again, approximately 54% listened to radio occasionally and only 3% had access to internet. Listenership of radio was varied by age groups. It was the highest among the literate truck drivers.

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Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of truck drivers (n=250)

Socio-demographic characteristics	Number	Percent
Age (in years)		
<30	96	38.40
30-40	104	41.60
>40	50	20.00
Mean age=33.81 , SD= 8.37		
Marital status		
Married	178	71.20
Unmarried	72	28.80
Religion		
Islam	242	96.80
Hinduism	8	3.20
Educational status		
Illiterate	66	26.40
Can read and write only	80	32.00
Completed primary	104	41.60
Professional experience (in years)		
<10	116	46.40
>10	134	53.60
Place of staying at night		
Hotel/boarding	126	50.40
Truck	120	48.00
Others	4	1.60
Income (in Taka)		
<10,000	50	20.00
>10,000	200	80.00

Source: Field survey, 2014

3.3 Truck Drivers' Awareness about Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Results of the current study display that as many as 88 percent of the truck drivers surveyed claimed that they heard of STDs. This result of the study is moderately consistent with that of the study carried out by Prajapati, & Sanjel (2014) on the wives of truck drivers in Nepal and also with the study done by Ojieabu, & Eze (2011) among commercial motorcyclists in Nigeria. Earlier study found that 96% of the respondents heard of STDs while the latter revealed that 100 percent of the participants heard of STDs. On the contrary, only 17% of the study participants heard of STDs in a study conducted by Khan (2002) in Bangladesh.

The findings of the present study again reveal that older as well as educated respondents and those with more experience were more likely to report that they heard of STDs compared to younger, illiterate and less experienced respondents respectively. HIV was found to be the most commonly known STD among the truck drivers (88.0%) who claimed to have heard of STDs.

The second common STD reported by the respondents was Syphilis (64%) followed by Gonorrhoea (24.0%). Surprisingly, no respondent had heard of a good number of STDs including Chlamydia, Herpes, Hepatitis B, and HPV. These findings of the current study were consistent with those of the study conducted by Kumar (2012).

Again, respondents were asked whether they know the symptoms of STDs. In response, 70% of the participants replied in the negative manner. Only 30% (n=75) reported having knowledge of STDs symptoms such as painful urination (24%), itching on genital area (18%), sores on sexual organs (15%), fatigue (5%) discharge from genital area (4%) etc. (multiple responses were permitted). This study also found positive association between level of education and awareness of the symptoms of STDs. Again, respondents staying at hotel/boarding knew symptoms more than those who stayed in truck. The main reason was that truck drivers staying at hotel or boarding, which is located next to brothels, approached commercial sex workers, did sexual intercourse and got knowledgeable about those STDs.

Similarly, majority of the participants (87.20%) stated that they did not know about how to protect themselves from STDs and it was the highest among the illiterate truck drivers. Importantly, about 70 percent of the respondents said that they were not aware of STDs. The findings of the present study also display that respondents with less professional experience showed greater degree of propensity to say that they were not aware of STDs.

3.4 Association between Access to Mass Media and Awareness about STDs

A number of Chi-square (χ^2) and Cramer's V coefficients were computed to measure the association between access to mass media such as television, radio, newspaper and internet and some variables related to awareness of STDs.

3.5 Association between Access to Mass Media and Their Knowledge of STDs

Table 3 displays that access to mass media such as newspaper, radio and internet is significantly related to whether they have heard of STDs. The findings of the study demonstrate that exposure to newspaper and internet was significantly related to the dependent variable. Data show that truck drivers who did not read newspaper and did not have access to internet were more likely to say that they heard of STDs compared to those who read newspaper and had access to internet. The key reason for this type of association was that respondents got informed of STDs from their fellow colleagues or friends before they went to brothels for encountering intercourse with the commercial sex workers. However, exposure to radio was found to have positively associated with the dependent variable. It means that respondents with higher level of access to radio had the greater level of tendency to report that they heard of STDs.

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Table 2: Awareness about STDs among truck drivers (n=250)

Awareness about STDs	Number	Percent
Whether they have heard of STDs		
Yes	220	88.00
No	30	12.00
Whether they know the symptoms of STDs		
Yes	75	30.00
No	175	70.00
Whether they know how to protect themselves from STDs		
Yes	32	12.80
No	218	87.20
Whether they are aware of STDs		
Yes	76	30.40
No	174	69.60

Source: Field survey, 2014

3.6 Association between Access to Mass Media and Their Knowledge about the Symptoms of STDs

Access to newspaper, television and radio was emerged as significant determinants of whether they knew about the symptoms of STDs in the bivariate analyses. Specifically, respondents who had access to neither newspaper nor television nor radio were more likely to say that they did not know the symptoms of the STDs. It implies that mass media namely newspaper, television and radio did not cover any programs on the symptoms of STDs targeting truck drivers. Therefore, these mass media did not play starring role in disseminating the symptoms of STDs (e.g., Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, Chlamydia, Herpes, and Hepatitis B) among the respondents.

3.7 Relationship between Access to Mass Media and Whether They Know How to Protect Themselves from STDs

Next in significance was whether truck drivers knew how to protect themselves from STDs. This dependent variable was robustly and negatively associated with access to newspaper, television and radio. Results illustrate that participants who read newspaper, watched television and listened to radio showed greater propensity to state that they did not know how to protect themselves from STDs than those who did not have access to newspaper, television and radio. It means that they did not receive any information about how to protect themselves from STDs through these mass media. Rather, they got informed of these diseases from their friends, colleagues, CSWs and other sources like writings from the buses and billboards. But Kumar (2012) in his study found that most of the truck drivers in India (83%) acquired HIV/AIDS knowledge from television and radio.

3.8 Association between Access to Television and Their Awareness about STDs

Results reveal that exposure to television had significant and strong relationship with whether truck drivers were aware of STDs or not. Moreover, the current study found that access to television was significantly related to the dependent variable. Data showed that level of awareness of STDs was higher among the respondents with higher level of exposure to television. It also indicated that television played some role in making them aware of STDs like HIV. These results of the current study were moderately in line with the studies carried out by Abbasi et al., (2013), Huda, & Amanullah (2013), Khattri (2015) and Mondal et al., (2012). According to their studies, participants who watched television were more likely to have the highest degree of awareness of HIV. In the current study, however, results reveal that television did not telecast any program about other STDs except HIV/AIDS.

Table 3: Summary table of Chi-square and Cramer’s V values on awareness about STDs by access to mass media

Access to mass media	Awareness about STDs			
	Whether they have heard of STDs	Whether they know the symptoms of STDs	Whether they know how to protect themselves from STDs	Whether they are aware of STDs
	Cramer’s V values			
Do you read the newspaper?	V=.17**	V=7.23**	$\chi^2=8.65^{**}$	V=0.08
Do you watch television?	V=0.06	$\chi^2=0.15^{***}$	V=0.07*	V=0.42*
Do you listen to radio?	$\chi^2=5.27^{**}$	$\chi^2=5.41^{**}$	$\chi^2=1.31^*$	V=0.04
Do you have access to internet?	V=0.21***	V=0.22***	V=0.07	V=0.26

*Chi-square & Cramer’s V are significant at the ** p=0.01 & *0.05 level.

Source: Field survey, 2014

3.9 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged in assessing the results of this study. First, the researchers experienced some problems in collecting data since it was not easy to find respondents in three truck terminals and convince them. Second, existing literature and research lack useful information on truck drivers’ access to mass media and awareness of STDs. Therefore, it was difficult to provide useful literature and make comparison with other studies on the same. Third, because of the self-reported nature of the questionnaire, the

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honesty of respondents' responses may be questioned. However, the questionnaire was anonymous, which encouraged accurate and honest responses. With regard to future directions for research, a potential important area of research—impact of STDs knowledge on practices—was not examined in the current study. Another arena for further investigation concerns the social construction of risk practices of truck drivers in Bangladesh, which may be of great value for researchers and policy makers.

5. Conclusions

This study evaluated socio-demographic factors of truck drivers, their access to mass media, STDs awareness and explored the association between exposure to some modes of mass media and awareness of STDs. The current study found that respondents had higher degree of exposure to television and radio while they had lower level of access to newspaper and internet. Though ample studies have established that mass media play significant role in creating awareness of combatting STDs across the world (Bertrand et al., 2006; Darteh, 2013; Huda, & Amanullah, 2013; Khatrri, 2015; Kwankye, & Augustt, 2009; Myhre et al., 2000), however, in this study it was found that mass medium like television played mediocre role in disseminating information about STDs among the respondents. Notably, most of the media propagated HIV/AIDS related information ignoring other major STDs like Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, Herpes, Hepatitis B and HPV. Therefore, this study concludes that mass media may play vibrant role in disseminating information not only about HIV but also other STDs such as Chlamydia, Herpes, Hepatitis B, and HPV.

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Ms. Marzia Rahman is currently working as a Lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka. Earlier, she served as a faculty at Jagannath University and the Green University of Bangladesh for more than two years. Her area of research interest encompasses development communication, gender and communication, film studies and cultural analysis.

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