

Original Research Article

Immuno-Positivity of HIV among Long, Short Distance Drivers and Ordinary Drivers in Rivers State

ABSTRACT In this study, the immuno-positivity of HIV among long, short distance drivers and ordinary drivers in different motor parks in Choba and Rumuokoro community Rivers State was investigated for their retroviral status. A total of 81 commercial drivers between the ages 30-56 while 15 ordinary drivers between the ages 35-60 years old volunteered for the screening. Questionnaires were administered to the participants before their blood samples were aseptically collected. HIV screening was carried out using Determine HIV² strips. The results showed that a 40-year old commercial driver (3%) in the long distance driver category tested positive for HIV 2. However, in the short distance driver category, two commercial drivers aged 38 and 41 respectively (4%) tested positive for HIV 2. The ordinary drivers were all tested negative for HIV 2. The level of HIV awareness among Long, short distance drivers and ordinary drivers is 84%. Sixteen are aware of all routes of transmission while 16% have very little or no knowledge of the non-sexual routes. Response from the questionnaire showed a high level (84%) of awareness of HIV infection. Due to the nature of their occupation, commercial drivers are always exposed to multiple sex partners. Therefore, HIV awareness, prevention and treatment should be vigorously encouraged among commercial drivers.

Keyword: Awareness, HIV, Long and Short distance drivers, Ordinary drivers, Questionnaires

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) belongs to a special class of viruses called retroviruses. Within this class, HIV is placed in a subgroup of lentiviruses. HIV leads to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) a condition which leads to failure in the immune system of very human life [1]. HIV is a highly variable virus which mutates very readily thus, within the body of an infected person there are many different strains of HIV [2]. Based on genetic similarities, the numerous virus strains may be classified into types, groups and subtypes. There are two types of HIV: HIV-1 and HIV-2 [3]. Both types are transmitted largely by sexual contact, through blood and from mother to child. Thomas *et al.* [4] reports that Human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome remain a major public health issue in the world today. HIV is threatening the very existence of every humankind as one out of every 100 is affected by this disease in the world [4]. The group of people at higher risk of acquiring HIV infection are people with blood and blood product recipients, sex vendors and buyers, both heterosexuals and homosexual, mobile population, and patients treated with unsterilized medical instruments [1]. The risk of HIV infection through unprotected vaginal sex with an infected person is estimated to be 2 to 4 times higher for women than for men [5]. In many developing countries, women are dependent on men socially, economically and emotionally, thus impairing the ability to persuade the sexual partners to use condoms [3]. However, this study aims to establish the immuno-positivity of HIV among the mobile population of long and short distance drivers as well as ordinary drivers in Rivers State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample collection and location

A total of One Hundred (100) Long, Short Distance Drivers and ordinary drivers volunteered to participate in this study across three motor parks in Rivers State. Thirty-One (31) were Long Distance Drivers, fifty (50) were short distance drivers and fifteen (15) were ordinary drivers. Blood samples were collected from the study population after their consent was sought, at Choba Motor Park for Long distance drivers and Rumuokoro Motor Parks for short distance drivers and Choba and Rumuokoromotor parks for ordinary drivers. The samples were immediately transported to the laboratory for analyses.

Sampling Procedure and HIV Screening

The method used involved the collection of blood sample from the sample population and the subsequent administration of questionnaires to the study population. This was followed by blood sample collection using sterile syringes which was later transferred into properly labeled EDTA bottles. The HIV tests conducted were based on the principle of agglutination or immunodot reactions [6]. The test kit used for the screening was Determine HIV-1/2. The Determine Kit contains 10 HIV 1/2 synthetic peptide coated test card and recombinant antigen. The blood sample was aseptically collected and allowed to settle. The plasma was separated from the whole blood and subsequently used for the screening. A drop of the plasma was aseptically dropped on the HIV strip using Pasteur pipette. A double line and single line on the strip indicates a positive and negative result respectively.

Data Analysis

The results obtained in the study were represented in tables. The prevalence of HIV was determined from the proportion of positive individuals under consideration and expressed in percentages.

Results

A total of 31 blood samples were screened for HIV from long distance drivers and only 1 (3%) was positive. A total of 50 blood samples were screened for HIV from short distance drivers and 2 (4%) were positive. Out of the 19 blood samples screened for HIV from ordinary drivers none 0(0%) was positive (Table 1). The level of HIV awareness among long, short distance drivers and ordinary drivers was 84%. Out of the long and short distance drivers, 27 (87%) and 19 (82%) had general knowledge of HIV respectively while 16 (80%) ordinary drivers had knowledge of the virus (Table 2). Table 2 further shows the respective study population's awareness of HIV management, non-sexual routes of HIV as well as the window period of the virus. In the long distance driver category, 12 (39%) reported that they had sexual intercourse with sex workers while 19 (61%) responded in the negative (Table 3). Fifteen long distance drivers (48%) reported that they used condoms while the other 16 (52%) revealed that they did not use condoms during sexual intercourse with commercial sex workers. The number of short distance drivers who reported that they had sex with sex workers was 9 (18%) while 41 (82%) said that they had not had sex with sex workers. Twenty of the short distance drivers (40%) reported the use of condoms while 30 (60%) reported non-usage of condoms during sex with commercial

sex workers. The number of ordinary distance drivers who reported they had sex with a sex workers was 5 (26%) while 14 (74%) responded in the negative. Out of this group, 9 (47%) used condoms while 10 (53%) reported the non-usage of condoms as shown in table 3.

Table1: Total Immuno-positivity among Long, Short distance drivers and Ordinarydrivers

Category	Samples Size	Number of Drivers Tested	Percentage of Drivers Tested Positive (%)
Long Distance Drivers	31	1	3.2%
Short Distance Drivers	50	2	4.0%
Ordinary Drivers	19	0	0.0%

Table 2: HIV Awareness of Long, Short distance drivers and Ordinary drivers

Location	Knowledge of HIV	Knowledge of HIV Management	Knowledge of Non-sexual route of HIV Transmission	Knowledge of Window Period
Long Distance Drivers	27 (87%)	4 (13%)	4 (13%)	4 (13%)
Short Distance Drivers	41(82%)	9(18%)	9(18%)	9(18%)
Ordinary Distance Drivers	16(80%)	3(20%)	3(20%)	3(20%)

Table 3:Sexual History of Long, Short and Ordinary Distance Drivers

Location	Sample Size	None Condom Users	Condom Users	Drivers who had sex with a sex worker	Drivers who did not had sex with a sex worker
Long Distance Drivers	31	16 (52%)	15 (48%)	12 (39%)	19 (61%)
Short Distance Drivers	50	30 (60%)	20 (40%)	9(18%)	41 (82%)
Ordinary Distance Drivers	19	10(53%)	9(47%)	5(26%)	14(74%)

Discussion

HIV/AIDS is a pandemic affecting the poor and the rich, the educated and illiterate, the married and the single [7]. It has its tentacles in all groups of people. There are factors that predispose an individual to contract this virus. These factors include unprotected sex, use of contaminated sharp objects, and receiving of infected blood products [8]. An individual exposed to these conditions is said to be at high risk of contracting the virus [9]. Spending time away from home is one of those factors that predisposes an individual to behaviours that make them at risk of being infected with the virus [8] thus, long distance and short distance drivers are said to be a high risk group for HIV infection because of the nature of their occupation [3]. This study was carried out among long distance drivers, short distance drivers and ordinary drivers in Rivers State. The number of commercial drivers and ordinary drivers who volunteered to participate in this study were low as compared to the total number of drivers in the motor parks and communities used in the study. The reason many of the drivers were unwilling to participate in this study may be as a result of the fear of knowing their HIV status. Also, stigmatization against individuals already infected with the virus discourages many people from getting tested [9]. This is a big challenge towards the fight against the spread of HIV. A total immuno-positivity rate of 3.1% for HIV was recorded among the drivers for both long, short distance drivers and ordinary drivers. The low level of HIV immuno-positivity observed in this study could be as a result of increased awareness which resulted in less risky behaviour among the commercial drivers and ordinary drivers. In addition, the HIV test could have been carried out during when the viral load in the blood was very low which is the window period thus, resulted in the low antibodies production by the immune system. During the window period, the kit employed in this study shows a visual negative result when screened. This finding of low HIV immuno-positivity is similar to the immuno-positivity rate of 3.1% reported by Buseri *et al.* [10] (2009) among prospective blood donors in Osogbo, Nigeria and differs from 6.0% immuno-positivity rate reported by Egah *et al.* [11] among blood donors in Jos, Nigeria. It also differs from the 10% immuno-positivity rate reported by Frank-Peterside *et al.* [1] among long distance truck drivers in Nigeria. The study population showed that most of the drivers were above 40 years old, (35% for 40 – 44 years and 39% for 45 and above). This could have resulted in the low immuno-positivity of HIV observed in this study. This finding agrees with Thomas *et al* [4] who observed that the older the age, the lower immuno-positivity of HIV in a population. Furthermore, most of the drivers were found to be married to one partner. This may also account for the reason why the immuno-positivity rate of HIV was low in this study. This is because most of the drivers do not have multiple sex partners and as a result are at a lesser risk of being infected with HIV [2]. Having multiple sex partners has been advocated as a risk factor for HIV [12]. Furthermore, 100% of the drivers involved in the study were male while none (0%) were females. The reason is that there are very few female commercial drivers and ordinary drivers in the State. This could be the reason why the rate is low in this study. It was observed that on the basis of HIV awareness that 87%, 82% and 80% of the long distance, short distance drivers and ordinary drivers respectively had knowledge of HIV while a lower proportion of the drivers had knowledge of HIV management

and non-sexual route of HIV transmission. This high knowledge of HIV recorded in the study could have contributed to the low HIV immuno-positivity rate observed in this study. This is because when there is a high level of awareness, one takes necessary precaution to avoid risk behaviours that could predispose him to getting infected with HIV. However, more awareness programs should be carried out on HIV management and other non-sexual route of HIV transmission in order to further reduce the immuno-positivity of HIV.

Conclusion

HIV remains one of the global threats of human existence and the best approach to limit its prevalence is prevention of the transmission of the virus. This can be achieved when the risk factors and groups are identified as this will aid targeted HIV prevention campaigns among the groups. Generally, drivers are considered to be at a risk of getting infected because of the attendant exposure in their occupation. In this study, the immuno-positivity of HIV among the drivers was found to be low. However, more HIV awareness campaigns should be encouraged among commercial drivers and mass HIV testing should be conducted routinely on drivers for early detection and adequate management of the disease.

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