

Context and Correlates of Health Behaviors in South India

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Project Description: This 5-year study is being conducted in collaboration with three Indian NGOs: YRGCARE in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, SHADOWS in Chirala, Andhra Pradesh, and Shelter in Calicut, Kerala. The overall goal is to obtain a better understanding of HIV risk taking in the context of alcohol consumption among male migrant workers (MMWs) and female sex workers (FSWs) in South India. A secondary goal of this project is to develop and pilot-test a risk reduction intervention among these two groups. Specifically, we will:

1. Conduct qualitative interviews with our target populations to examine patterns of alcohol consumption; sexual risk taking; cultural- and population-specific factors; and the relationship between motivation, alcohol consumption, its socio-cultural context and sexual behaviors.
2. Develop and administer a quantitative survey to measure the prevalence and patterns of sexual risk taking and alcohol consumption, as well as the relationship between sexual risk taking, patterns of alcohol consumption and other motivational, interpersonal, socio-cultural and contextual variables in the target populations.
3. Develop, implement and pilot test a risk-reduction intervention to reduce HIV risk taking in the context of alcohol use among South Indian FSWs and MMWs.

Significance: According to both UNAIDS and NACO, there are more than five million people living with HIV infection in India. Although alcohol use is an important factor in both HIV transmission and disease progression in developed countries, little is known about these relationships in the developing world, including India. Previous studies suggest that alcohol consumption is not prevalent in the general Indian population, but that it is common in subgroups of individuals who are also at high risk for HIV. Preliminary data from slum areas in Delhi suggest that these groups drink to cope with mental distress and loneliness, to enhance sexual pleasure and performance, and that this alcohol use may be related to HIV risk taking. Data are currently limited on specific alcohol use patterns in these groups, how these patterns serve as a context for sexual risk taking, and how these behaviors are influenced by individual, interpersonal, contextual and regional factors. Such information is crucial for developing effective, targeted risk reduction programs.

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