

P4.11. Understanding Self-perceptions of HIV/STI Risk among Married Young People in India · K.G. Santhya, Population Council; Shireen J. Jejeebhoy, Population Council
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Background/ Significance: In India, emerging evidence suggests that married young people constitute groups with distinct risks of HIV. Unfortunately, both formative and intervention research that sheds light on the essential elements needed for successful HIV prevention interventions among young people is very limited. Moreover, only a few studies have explored the relevance of perceived personal risk and self-efficacy in explaining adoption or non-adoption of HIV/STIs risk-reduction strategies among married young people, but they are small-scale studies based on convenience samples.

Main Question /Hypothesis: This paper attempts to address the following questions: What are married young women's and men's perceptions of personal risk of HIV/STIs? To what extent such perceptions match with young people's reports of risky behaviours and situations? What are some of the factors that underlie risk perceptions among those reporting risky behaviours and situations including unprotected premarital and extra-marital sexual experiences?

Methodology: A cross-sectional study, comprising a pre-survey qualitative phase and a survey, was conducted during June 2006- February 2007 in two geographic settings: one characterised by low median age at marriage and age at first birth, and *high* prevalence of sexually transmitted infection (STI)/HIV (Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh), and the second characterised by low median age at marriage and age at first birth, and *low* STI/HIV prevalence (Dhar and Guna districts, Madhya Pradesh). Respondents included married young women aged 15-24 years and men aged 15-29 years.

Data on percentages of married young women and men who felt that they were at risk of contracting STI/HIV will be presented separately for the general sample and for a sub-sample of those who had engaged in risky behaviours. Multivariate regression will be used to examine the factors associated with risk perceptions among those who had engaged in risky behaviours.

Data: A total of 3,087 married young women and 2,622 young men were interviewed. However, findings are presented from a sub-sample of 2,128 married young women and 1,899 men who reported awareness of HIV/STIs.

Findings: Analysis is ongoing. Preliminary findings show that perceptions of personal risk of HIV/STIs were generally low; just 15% of women and 9% of men perceived themselves to be at risk. Even among those who reported risky behaviours, only 31% of women and 13% of men perceived that they were at risk, indicating substantial disconnect between risk perceptions and reports of risky behaviours and situations.

Traditional notions of masculinity among men and experience of authoritarian marital relations among young women were important factors underlying risk perceptions among those reporting risky behaviours and situations. Among men, those who exhibited greater notions of masculinity (exercised power in household matters, held negative attitudes towards condom use) were less likely than others to acknowledge that they were at risk. Among women, in contrast, those who reported controlling behaviours of husband and experienced forced sex within marriage appeared more likely than others to perceive themselves to be at risk.

Knowledge Contribution: Findings highlight the need to break down traditional notions of masculinity, enhance negotiation powers among women and foster greater communication among spouses. Insights generated by this research will contribute to programmatic efforts to build in-depth awareness on sexual and reproductive health matters, and enable young people to calculate their own and their partners' risks correctly and adopt appropriate protective actions.