

HIV/AIDS KMCC

Strengthening Knowledge Management & Communications Capacity

Image credit: Pal Teravagimov



Long distance truck drivers and HIV/AIDS in Uganda: Synthesis of information and evidence to inform the response

Abridged Report

This is an abridged version of the Knowledge Management and Communication Capacity building initiative (KMCC) knowledge synthesis, *Long distance truck drivers and HIV/AIDS in Uganda: Synthesis of information and evidence to inform the response*, the second in a series dealing with most at risk populations (MARPs). The working paper is available at www.kmcc.org.ug.

Most at risk populations in Uganda

KMCC aligns with multi-sector efforts to stem the HIV epidemic in Uganda. Long distance truck drivers, sex workers and their clients, uniformed services, fishing communities, men who have sex with men and injecting drug users are listed in the Uganda National HIV Prevention Strategy as most at risk populations (MARPs) – groups which have a higher than average risk of acquiring HIV.

The level of HIV among long distance truck drivers is high, chiefly because their lifestyle provides many opportunities for risky sexual behaviour, and because they have limited access to HIV prevention, testing and counselling, and healthcare.

In preparing this synthesis, KMCC undertook a comprehensive literature review, and interviewed practitioners and experts who have worked with or studied HIV/AIDS in long distance truck drivers across Uganda and East Africa. The review of the evidence shows that there is an urgent need to upscale targeted HIV-prevention efforts to long distance truck drivers.

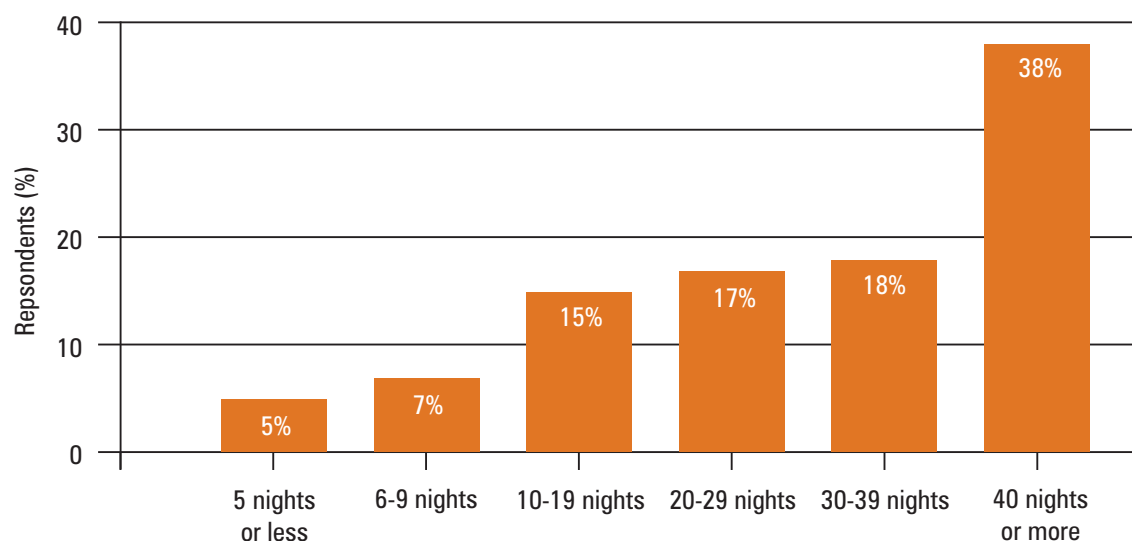
www.kmcc.org.ug

Long distance truck drivers in Uganda

The review covered both long distance truck drivers and the assistants who travel with them. Long distance truck drivers move goods along major transport corridors within Uganda, and to and from neighbouring countries. Estimates put the number of long distance truck drivers in Uganda at any given time of the year at over 31,500.

“Truck drivers spend nearly half the year away from home. They tend to have multiple partners as a result of this.”

Time spent at home by truck drivers in the 12 months before interview
(International Organization for Migration, 2008)



Prevalence of HIV among long distance truck drivers

The prevalence of HIV among long distance truck drivers ranges between 25% and 32%, considerably higher than the average prevalence nationally of 7.3%. The prevalence of HIV is also high among people who live near truck stops.

The transport sector is a major vector in the spread and transmission of HIV/AIDS for two reasons:

- The constant stream of large numbers of people along transport routes
- The sexual behaviours of transport sector workers and groups, such as sex workers, that interact with them

Knowledge of HIV among long distance truck drivers

Long distance truck drivers are knowledgeable about HIV. Over 98% are aware that engaging with multiple sexual partners and engaging in unprotected sex with an infected partner increase the risk of acquiring HIV. This knowledge, however, does not translate into safer sexual behaviour.

Sexual behaviour of long distance truck drivers

Behaviours widespread among long distance truck drivers that contribute to the high prevalence of HIV are:

- Engaging with multiple sexual partners
- Inconsistent condom use
- Delaying seeking treatment for sexually transmitted infections

An individual with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) is more likely than an uninfected individual to contract HIV from unprotected sex. Postponing treatment for STIs is, therefore, a significant factor in the high prevalence of HIV among long distance truck drivers.

“When a vehicle breaks down on safari, we drink and sleep with women... we have sexual partners scattered all along the routes we follow on safari.”

Vulnerability to HIV of long distance truck drivers

Factors that contribute to the vulnerability of long distance truck drivers to HIV are:

- Long distance truck drivers are mobile or migratory
- They have money to spend, work irregular hours, are away from home and are not inhibited by the social structures of stable communities – circumstances that favour drinking alcohol and casual sex
- Their occupation is risky and this can lead to a fatalistic attitude
- Many drink alcohol and take other drugs to cope with boredom and stress
- Sex workers and impoverished women congregate at truck stops and trading hubs to sell sex, alcohol and food
- Many delay seeking treatment for HIV and STIs
- Truck stops seldom have facilities that offer condoms and healthcare services for treating STIs and HIV

Effects on communities and the economy

The International Labour Organization estimates that HIV/AIDS will lower economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa by as much as 25% by 2020 because workers living with HIV may die or become sick in their most productive years. The worst affected sectors will be transport, mining and fishing. The impacts of HIV/AIDS will not only effect economic growth but will affect households and communities. A shortage of truck drivers caused by death or ill health related to HIV could lead to a serious fall in the productivity and efficiency of the transport sector.

Experience in addressing HIV/AIDS among long distance truck drivers

Effective measures taken by various agencies and organisations in Uganda to address HIV/AIDS among long distance truck drivers include:

- Setting up moonlight clinics in truck stops to offer HIV prevention services at night
- Providing information, such as through health education sessions in parking yards, bars and lodges
- Region-wide sensitisation campaigns
- Educating sex workers on safe sex and negotiation skills
- Converting shipping containers into clinics that can be located in places with limited or no access to healthcare services

Gaps and challenges

The review points to gaps and challenges, including:

- Limited programmes to prevent HIV in transport corridor hot spots
- Inadequate coordination
- Inadequate funding for HIV programmes that target MARPs along transport corridors
- Limited interventions to change sexual behaviour
- Limited services for HIV care and treatment

Recommendations

The synthesis indicates that there is a need for a much larger and more coordinated effort to tackle the vulnerability of long distance truck drivers to HIV/AIDS. A coordinated effort would involve:

- Making condoms, testing for HIV, counselling and treatment for HIV/STIs easily available in places frequented by long distance truck drivers
- Engaging sex workers in behaviour change activities in places frequented by long distance truck drivers
- Addressing fatalistic attitudes

Programmes and behaviour change messaging should encourage long distance truck drivers to:

- Use condoms correctly and consistently
- Limit the number of sexual partners they engage with
- Limit the intake of alcohol
- Seek healthcare for sexually transmitted infections and HIV

National recommendations

Efforts to address HIV among truck drivers are disjointed and uncoordinated. Organisations run most programmes independently and have no common strategy. To tackle the lack of coordination, the following actions should be taken:

- Undertake a nationwide sero-behavioural survey to collect data on the prevalence of HIV and behaviour patterns among long distance truck drivers
- Allocate adequate funding and resources to provide long distance truck drivers with access to HIV services, specifically in hot spots of HIV-risky behaviours
- Ensure appropriate infrastructure and trained healthcare personnel to strengthen access to and the quality of HIV services and information
- Sensitise businesses in the transport sector to the need to create, fund and operate HIV/AIDS and health programmes, and to develop and implement HIV/AIDS workplace policies as part of their corporate social responsibility
- Strengthen government coordination structures to ensure programme synergies are aligned with policies

Recommendations for implementing partners

Long distance truck drivers are the people best placed to identify the measures that will lessen their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Implementing partners should:

- Commit to strengthened coordination among partners to ensure a consistent and appropriately targeted approach to programming and communications
- Adopt a community-led approach to creating context-specific programmes and materials to cater for the particular needs of long distance truck drivers, sex workers and communities
- Target interventions to places frequented by long distant truck drivers
- Acknowledge literacy levels and language barriers, and use illustrations in behaviour change materials instead of text

Conclusions

Although long distance truck driving as an occupation is not a risk factor for HIV infection, the nature of the work, the fatalistic culture, limited accessibility to condoms at night and opportunities to engage with multiple sexual partners along transport corridors encourage risky sexually behaviour that exposes long distance truck drivers to HIV/AIDS. There is an urgent need to target HIV prevention and research effort to this vulnerable group.

“The transport sector is characterised by work away from home...hence separation from regular sexual partners, a situation which increases the vulnerability of such workers to get involved in extra marital affairs or relationships, and this exposes them to HIV infection. The vulnerabilities have led to loss of irreplaceable experienced labour both skilled and unskilled. This in the end has affected efficiency, effectiveness and mentoring of upcoming labour and human resource in the sector.”

Contact us

If you want to find out more about how the KMCC Initiative can help your organisation find better ways to manage and communicate its information please email enquiries@kmcc.org.ug

Visit our office in Kampala at 91 Kira Road, Bukoto, Kampala or telephone us on +256-(0)312-202-939

Please visit our website to find out more about our work: www.kmcc.org.ug

Like us on facebook  or follow us on Twitter  @kmccuganda

Supported by DFID

