

Research gives truckers their voice in the AIDS epidemic

November 10 2014, by Amona Refaei

Truckers in India have a high risk of contracting AIDS. University of Cincinnati Professor Shaunak Sastry examined how the truckers discuss this risk in a paper that will be presented at the 100th annual convention for the National Communication Association from Nov. 20-23.

The truckers' high possibility of contracting AIDS is caused by the nature of their work in which they are often away from their families when they are on the road. As a result, these truckers often have multiple sexual partners and may visit sex workers. Sastry wanted to examine how the truckers negotiate their risk for HIV and how they talk about the disease and their risks.

Sastry found that the truckers use a lot of metaphors based on their morals when discussing the disease. In particular, when talking about AIDS, truckers bring up the idea of contamination through metaphors of dirt or pollution. Sastry's research also found that the truckers are cautious about the possibility of contraception being the only solution to India's AIDS epidemic.

Sastry completed his research with fieldwork in which he traveled to India and interviewed truckers to better understand their perspective about being in a [high risk](#) HIV environment. He was motivated to research this topic because he noticed that although there was much written about the truckers and their situation, there was not a lot being published from the truckers' perspective. His research can help the truckers whose voice was previously missing from the conversation.

During his fieldwork, Sastry found that when discussing HIV or AIDS, the truckers would bring up two recurring themes: contraception and contamination. Sastry notes that some of the language and metaphors used by these truckers is the same language used by many global think tanks in their campaigns to raise awareness about AIDS. The truckers seem to accept some aspects of these ideas while also challenging them. For example, Sastry states that many truckers believe that contraception and safe sex are the best way to try to avoid contracting HIV; however, the truckers also argue it may not really be feasible for them to have only [safe sex](#) given their particular life and working conditions.

The paper regarding truckers and the manner in which they discuss AIDS and their risks is currently being reviewed for publication in an international journal. However, before he submitted this work, Sastry work-shopped a rough revision of his [research](#) at the Kunz Center for Social Research, which is housed in McMicken's Department of Sociology. Sastry is also working on writing a book about truckers in India and how they talk about health.

In addition to this paper, Sastry is co-presenting a seminar about human trafficking with his former advisee Alyse DeLange at the NCA convention. Additionally, several other faculty members will represent UC's Department of Communication at this year's NCA convention.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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