

# Wives of migrant workers at higher risk of HIV in Nepal

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Local women queuing up for a free HIV test in Kapilvastu, one of the key districts of Nepal with large numbers of migrant workers. Credit: AIDS Healthcare Foundation

Travelling abroad to work or study has become a national trend in Nepal, especially in the young male population. Over three million Nepali

migrant workers are in the Middle East, Malaysia and India. Particularly in India and in Malaysia, migrant workers are involved in risky sexual practices which may have health consequences to their wives as well.

A recent study published in *SAARC Journal of Tuberculosis, Lung Diseases & HIV/AIDS* shows that wives of migrant workers in Nepal are at a higher risk of HIV, not because they are not aware of it but because they are scared to ask their [husbands](#) about their potentially risky sexual behaviour while abroad. The article is freely available online on the NepJOL platform, which is supported by INASP.

"Two-thirds of the research participants had generally good knowledge of HIV and its mode of transmission, but half of them could not ask their husbands about their potentially unsafe sexual practices while abroad," says Nirmal Aryal, one of the authors of the article and currently a PhD Scholar at the Department of Medicine, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand. This study was carried out by the University of Aberdeen, UK.

The research involved interviewing 182 women in two rural villages of Nepal to identify the level of knowledge and attitude of female spouses of Nepali migrant workers on HIV and [sexually transmitted infections](#) (STIs) and their understanding on migration-related risky sexual behaviours of their husbands while abroad.

Dr Pramod Regmi, co-author on this article and based at Bournemouth University (UK) summarizes the study's findings as, "knowledge alone would not be sufficient to fight against the spread of HIV/STI among wives of [migrant workers](#)."

Along with raising awareness for safer [sexual practices](#), "it is incredibly important to give attention towards 'cultural barriers' to negotiate safer sex as well such as uneven power relationships in sexual relationships

between husband and wife, and a dearth of awareness on sexual roles and rights of women," adds Aryal.

**More information:** N Aryal et al. Knowing is Not Enough: Migrant Workers' Spouses Vulnerability to HIV, *SAARC Journal of Tuberculosis, Lung Diseases and HIV/AIDS* (2017). [DOI: 10.3126/saarctb.v13i1.16923](https://doi.org/10.3126/saarctb.v13i1.16923)

Provided by INASP

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