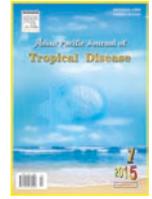


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## A new method to study knowledge, attitude and practice regarding HIV/AIDS in Iranian general population

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## ABSTRACT

There is no study to evaluate knowledge, attitude and sexual practices regarding HIV/AIDS in Iranian general population. Therefore, we chose barber shops as a safe cultural environment since all people, regardless of their social class and age, are customers of barber shops. This method or similar ways of data gathering in general population can be applied according to social and cultural conditions in each country.

Although HIV/AIDS is a serious concern in Iran, sufficient information with regard to its epidemiology is only available for certain major at risk groups including incarcerated individuals and injection drug users (IDU)[1-4] and there is no study from the general population. On the other hand, prevention programs would need to use the data from studies that describe the epidemiology of high risk behaviors among general population[5]. In fact, more recent studies have

highlighted the role of sexual transmission in the spread of infection among the general population[6]. Therefore, identification of high risk sexual behaviors among the general population as well as defining the level of knowledge with regard to HIV/AIDS transmission routes would be of utmost importance in designing effective preventive measures[7].

In order to obtain data from the general population, we defined specific indicators to assess the knowledge considering HIV transmission routes and practice of high risk sexual behaviors[7]. The first, we started the study[7] from the middle-aged men, because possibility of getting correct answers in this group is more than adolescent, young and elder men. The second, we initiated the study from Tehran since the city is

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large and the most people are educated. Consequently, asking questions about sexual behaviors is less sensitive culturally. Most importantly, it was necessary the study to be performed in a safe cultural environment so that participants properly respond to the questions. Therefore, we chose barber shops as a suitable place for this type of questions. The rationale for choosing barber shops was that all people, regardless of their social class and age, are customers of barber shops. In addition, people trust the owners and workers of barber shops and therefore, customers answer the questions easily. In the next step, we talked to Tehran barbers' union and took their consent for doing this study. Subsequently, the study was conducted among 1 000 men aged 20 to 50 years, visiting barber shops in Tehran as a pilot study in March 2012. We listed all barber shops of Tehran based on socioeconomic conditions and then selected 50 barber shops by cluster sampling. Each cluster included 20 individuals in our defined age range. Moreover, we awared owner and worker of barber shops about the study aim and investigators. Also we gave reassurance to them that the information would be used only for research purposes as well as each individual fill out the questionnaire anonymously and place it in a box in the barber shop. This method helped to reduce non-response rate of participants who had HIV-related issues and prevented the introduction of bias during the acquisition of data[7].

In some countries, direct methods of data gathering are not possible because of cultural barriers. Therefore, using methods that define indicators precisely and introduce minimum selection bias would be important. It seems that this method is appropriate to obtain data from women as well, at least in communities where they visit barber shops regularly. In this regard, we carried out the same method for women in Tehran, and to date, results indicate proper acceptance of this method among Iranian women. Our pilot study in Tehran assessed a local sample with this method and we plan to conduct similar studies nationally. Although it is not possible to use this exact method in each country, similar methods of data gathering can be applied according to the social and cultural conditions.

### Conflict of interest statement

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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