

## **Abstract**

### **Shift in sexual behavior among unmarried male college students of Maharashtra, India: need action now to tackle this worrisome trend**

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In India, youths are considered to be at low risk of HIV infection. National AIDS Control Program is not targeting the youth intensively with behavior change messages. The present study describes the risk behaviors of unmarried male college students including the violence happening due to this. The sexual behavior patterns of 1090 (2004), 745 (2006) and 441 (2008) neither married nor cohabitating male college students were analyzed, using data from three waves (2004, 2006 and 2008) of Behavior Surveillance Surveys (BSS) in Maharashtra. A two-stage sampling design was used to select the college students. To achieve optimal distribution of sample across different geographical regions, list of sites was geographically arranged before applying sampling procedure. Quantitative findings were supplemented by eight Focus Group Discussions in 2006 and 2008. The proportion of students having sexual intercourse with commercial sex workers declined from 23% (95% CI 19.98-25.02) in 2004 to 5% (95% CI 3.37-6.63) in 2006 to 3% (95% CI 2.27-5.38) in 2008. Students having sex with casual non commercial sex partners (girlfriends) increased from 11% (95% CI 4.88-16.12) in 2004 to 16 % (95% CI 12.37-17.63) in 2008. FGDs corroborating the shift in behavior revealed that the students prefer girl friends over commercial partners, because less money is spent and the risk of contracting HIV is perceived to be less due to their family background. Instances of sexual violence were also reported incase of resistance from the girl friends. This shift in behavior is worrisome as a further increase could escalate the spread of HIV from high-risk groups to general population and there will be increase in sexual violence. Based on these findings, it is important not to be complacent regarding youth's potential exposure to HIV and need to plan now appropriate behavior change communication programs focusing on a balanced ABC approach.