

《活跃的北京的哥拒谈“性”》

Talktive Beijing taxi drivers clam up on sex

BEIJING - Beijing's taxi drivers can usually be relied on to be able to discuss almost any topic. But there's one subject that many of them would rather not talk about, especially here in China: sex.

Fang Junjun, for example, clams up when someone tries to steer a conversation towards his sexual health. "I'm a conservative person," says the 42-year-old who has been driving a taxi for the past two years. "I do not like to talk about it."

The traditional Chinese concept that sex is a taboo, combined with the operations of the taxi industry, has made it difficult for the China Family Planning Association (CFPA) to carry out a project that aims to improve sexual and reproductive health awareness among male taxi drivers here.

But the five-month project, which ended in March, was deemed important enough by the CFPA that the organization pressed on to implement it despite the challenges.

Qi Yuling, a program officer at CFPA's international division, explains: "China's birth control and family planning work used to focus on women. There is a misunderstanding in China that women shoulder more responsibilities in reproductive health. Most of the contraception measures are designed for women."

"However," she says, "in most circumstances, the male plays an active part in sexual behavior, posing a great impact on women's reproductive health and pregnancy."

"Paying attention to the reproductive health of men is not only for the interest of men, but also for the health of women and children, and the harmony and happiness between men and women," Qi thus argues. "It will also help improve the population quality of China."

But why taxi drivers in particular? Qi points out that unfortunately, their occupation, which includes long hours of sitting, puts them among those at high risks of having reproductive health problems. At the same time, she says, many of them know little about how to protect their sexual and reproductive health.

"The most common problem related to reproductive system among male taxi drivers is inflammation of the prostate gland," says He Lijun, a doctor with the Wu Jieping Urinary Surgery Medical Center affiliated to the Peking University. "However, most of the drivers don't pay enough attention to their health, and lack medical services."

In fact, a baseline survey among the taxi drivers taking part in the program shows that 56.7 percent had previously suffered from Erectile Dysfunction (ED). In addition, only 20 percent of the respondents accurately knew how to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

A total of 350 taxi drivers were given a free physical check-up as part of the project. He says that they reveal prostatitis among taxi drivers as being about 10 percent more common than in the general public.

The project, which is supported by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), includes as well face-to-face training for male taxi drivers on family planning, sexual health and prevention of transmission of HIV/AIDS, and other venereal diseases.

Some of the taxi drivers, accompanied by experts, also visited a reproductive health exhibit in a museum within the Wu Jieping Urinary Surgery Medical Center.

Further, brochures about sexual and reproductive health were put into taxis for passengers to read or take with them.

The original plan had also stipulated free condoms in cabs for passengers. But this was shot down by project participants, and the CFPA has had to content itself with urging drivers to value condoms as much as they do seat belts, since both protect their safety.

"It goes against China's traditions," says Li Hong, secretary general of the Family Planning Association of Shijingshan District, Beijing Municipality, referring to the condoms-in-taxis idea. "The general public is conservative on the topic of sex. No taxi company would like to put condoms on their cabs."

That, however, was not the reason why the big taxi company that CFPA had partnered with initially opted to bow out of the project. According to the taxi firm, the physical examinations and training were delaying the drivers' work.

There are more than 90,000 taxi drivers in Beijing, most of whom clock a daily average of at least 10 hours at the wheel. Some 1,000 are individual drivers who own their cabs but are part of a taxi company. It was one of these small taxi firms with which CFPA eventually ended up running its sexual and reproductive health project.

Cultural taboos have continued to dog the project, though. For instance, CFPA had also wanted to partner with Beijing Communication Radio, one of the most popular radio stations in Beijing among drivers, to produce program that spread information about sexual and reproductive health.

"But," recounts Qi, "a producer with Beijing Communication Radio told us that things related to body parts below the waist cannot be broadcast in their program."

The CFPA project calls on participating male taxi drivers to help promote knowledge of sexual and reproductive health with other drivers and passengers as well. But much like Fang Junjun, most of the drivers are balking over the prospects of talking about sex and other related topics.

"No, I cannot talk about it unless others raise this subject," says Fan Peicai, who has spent 18 of his 52 years driving a taxi. "The young men know more about sex than me. And people at my age wouldn't talk about it."