

A Study on Awareness of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS among Adolescent Girls Aged 15-17 Years, in Koti, Hyderabad

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ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescent age group forms a most vulnerable population for exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. It is very important that adolescent females should be equipped with ample amount of information to protect themselves from falling a prey to these diseases.

Objectives: (i) To assess the awareness of college going adolescents regarding HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. (ii) To suggest improvements in curriculum about STD's for school and college going students.

Methodology: Convenient sampling was done, by taking the students whoever was available at the time of study. 200 students were included in the study.

Results and Discussion: Most of the students (97.5%) heard about HIV/AIDS, and 84.5% heard about the term Sexually Transmitted Disease. Most of the students' medium of awareness was academics in school and college and through friends. Most of them do not know the mode of spread, symptoms, and methods of prevention and treatment of STD's. Hence there is a need to improve the curriculum of the school as well as college going students and to increase the role of media in imparting the knowledge about HIV/AIDS as well as STD's.

Key Words: Adolescents, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency virus), AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent age group forms a most vulnerable population for exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. Programme and policy makers often reiterate that educational institutions can act as centre points to disseminate information and education on HIV/AIDS. School education has also been considered as 'social vaccine', as education serves as powerful preventive tool for any kind of disease. ⁽¹⁾ In India, there exists a wide gap between the curriculum of HIV/AIDS and education imparted about it. It is very important that adolescent females should be equipped with

ample amount of information to protect themselves from falling a prey to these diseases.

With this background, this study was undertaken with the following objectives

(i) To assess the awareness of college going adolescents regarding HIV/AIDS and STDs.

(ii) To suggest improvements on HIV/AIDS curriculum for school and college students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was undertaken as a pilot in July - August 2016, in a Private Junior college (English medium), Koti with 400 female students. The students included

in the study belonged to Biology, Mathematics and Economics branches of Intermediate education. Convenience sampling was done. Numbers of available students at the time of study were 200. All of them were included in the study. The students were given a self administered pre designed questionnaire which included multiple choice questions. Questionnaire was given in local language (Telugu) and in English. Written consent was obtained from college principal after explaining the purpose of study. Data was entered and analyzed in proportions using micro soft excel 10 version.

RESULTS

In the present study, all the students belonged to age group 15-17years. All were female students as the college selected was Government Womens College. Most of the students, 97.5% of them heard about HIV/AIDS though only 10% of them could write the correct expansion of AIDS and 11.5% of them could write the correct expansion of HIV. Medium of awareness about STDs and HIV was academics in school for most of the students. The next medium which could impart awareness was through friends, newspaper and television.

Table1: Awareness related to STDs and HIV

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Ever heard about Sexually Transmitted Diseases | 169 | 84.5 |
| Ever heard about following diseases | 195 | 97.5 |
| HIV/AIDS | 6 | 3 |
| Syphilis | 0 | 0 |
| Gonorrhea | 0 | 0 |
| Chancroids | 20 | 10 |
| Able to write expansion of AIDS | 23 | 11.5 |
| Able to write expansion of HIV | 160 | 80 |
| Medium of awareness about AIDS/HIV* | 20 | 10 |
| Academics in school | 8 | 4 |
| Parents | 57 | 28.5 |
| Siblings | 46 | 23 |
| Friends | 54 | 27 |
| Television | 8 | 4 |
| Newspaper | | |
| Radio/FM | | |

*Responses are not mutually exclusive

70% of the students could name sexual mode of transmission for HIV. Mother to child transmission of HIV was also known by majority of the students (57.5%). Few students knew about unsafe blood transfusion and needle sharing as route of transmission for HIV/AIDS. It has to be noted that there were some students who believed that HIV can be transmitted through mosquito bite, hand shaking, hugging and kissing, eating in same plate of HIV patient.

Table 2: Knowledge on route of transmission of HIV/AIDS*

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Knowledge on transmission of HIV/AIDS | 140 | 70 |
| Sexual transmission | 115 | 57.5 |
| Mother to child | 69 | 34.5 |
| Unsafe blood transfusion | 58 | 29 |
| Sharing needles/syringes | 39 | 19.5 |
| Mosquito bite from infected person | 20 | 10 |
| Hand shaking | 31 | 15.5 |
| Hugging and Kissing | 28 | 14 |
| Eating in same plate of HIV patient | | |

*Responses are not mutually exclusive

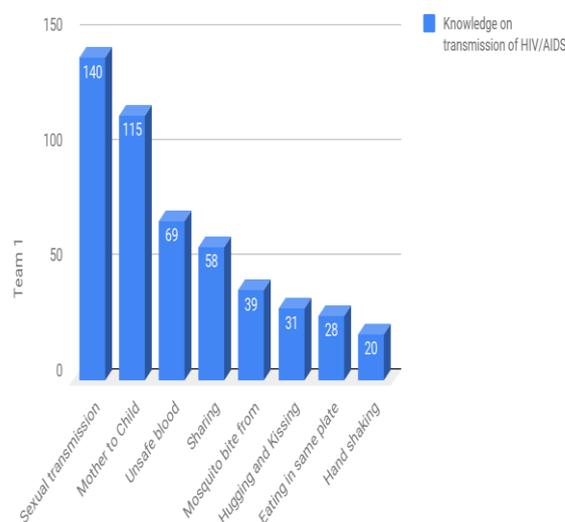


Chart 1: Distribution of study subjects according to Knowledge on transmission of HIV/AIDS

Most of the women in Telangana region get married in their teenage (2) immediately after Tenth class or Intermediate education discontinuing their studies. They are likely to suffer from sexually transmitted diseases at a very early age. Hence this study also aimed to know the knowledge of students regarding symptoms, prevention and treatment of

STD's, so that they would get appropriate treatment without any delay. But the study revealed 70-85% of the students has no idea regarding any of the main symptoms of STD's. 45% of them thought lower

abdominal pain and lower back ache could be the possible symptoms of STD's. 15% of the students didn't know about any of the symptoms of STD's.

Table 3: Knowledge on symptoms related to Sexually Transmitted Diseases

| Variable | Yes (in %) | No (in %) | Don't know (in %) |
|--|------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Which of the following do you think are the symptoms of Sexually transmitted diseases in females? | | | |
| Profuse vaginal discharge | 21 | 64 | 15 |
| Foul smelling vaginal discharge | 11 | 74 | 15 |
| Itching in the genital area | 14 | 71 | 15 |
| Lower abdominal pain | 44.5 | 40.5 | 15 |
| Lower back ache | 44.5 | 40.5 | 15 |

Table4. Knowledge on prevention and treatment of STDs

| Variable | Yes (in %) | No(in %) | Don't know (in %) |
|--|------------|----------|-------------------|
| Do you think STDs can be prevented by | | | |
| Sexual abstinence | 42 | 41 | 17 |
| Using Condoms | 28 | 55 | 17 |
| Using Oral Contraceptive Pills | 16 | 67 | 17 |
| Washing genital area after sex | 17 | 66 | 17 |
| Being faithful to one partner | 34 | 49 | 17 |
| Family planning operations | 19 | 64 | 17 |
| Do you think STDs can be treated by | | | |
| Going to a doctor and taking regular medicines | 70 | 21 | 9 |
| Praying God/wearing amulets | 11 | 79 | 10 |
| Indigenous medicines(AYUSH method) | 26 | 64 | 10 |
| Hysterectomy(removal of uterus in females) | 17 | 66 | 17 |

DISCUSSION

In this study 84.5% and 97.5% of the students were aware of the terms STDs and HIV/AIDS respectively. But only 10% of the students could write the full form AIDS and 11.5% of them could write the full form of HIV. In a study done in Secondary School children, Delhi, ⁽¹⁾ 100% of them were aware of HIV/AIDS, 51% of them could write the full form of AIDS and 20% of them could write the full form of HIV.

With regard to the medium of awareness about HIV/AIDS, 80% of the students mentioned that academics of the school was the main source of information to them, in contrast to the study done in Delhi, ⁽¹⁾ where the school academics could contribute to only 9.5%. A majority (62.7%) of senior secondary students belonging to a government school in Chandigarh reported that they derived most of the information from TV and radio. ⁽³⁾ In our study, only 23% of children had heard about HIV/AIDS through Television and 8% through radio/FM. This finding suggests that AIDS education through mass media can still be

improved in Telangana. As much as 27% of the students obtained information from print media, whereas for 28%, friends remained the source of information.

In the present study, 70% of the students were aware that the mode of transmission could be through sexual intercourse, 57% were aware of mother to child transmission and 34 % were aware of risk of transmission through sharing of needles. In the study in Delhi, ⁽¹⁾ 48.2% were aware that the mode of transmission could be through sexual intercourse, 31 % of them knew it could be due to blood transfusion, 44% were aware of the risk through sharing of needles, mother to child transmission was known only to 23% of the students.

In an interventional study done by Suminder Kaur et al ⁽⁴⁾ on mid - adolescent girls of 14-17 years age, 42% knew about HIV/AIDS, 19% of them could tell the symptoms of STD's, 22% were aware that STDs can be prevented by avoiding sex with the person who has STD, and 12% were aware that use of condoms can prevent

STDs. In the present study 11-44% of them were having correct knowledge about various symptoms of STD's, 42% told that STD's could be prevented by sexual abstinence and 28% were aware that the use of condoms can prevent STD's.

In the study done by Suminder Kaur et al ⁽⁴⁾ the number of girls who thought that AIDS can spread through mosquito bite was 8.3%, whereas in our study 20% of the girls had the misconception about mosquito bite. Most of the students (70-80%) in this study had no knowledge or had misconception about prevention of STD's. Most of them did not know the importance of physical barriers in preventing sexually transmitted diseases. There were 11% of the students who thought that STDs could be treated by wearing amulets or praying to God, 26% of them had belief in indigenous methods of treatment for STD's. The findings were similar to a study done in Nigeria ⁽⁵⁾ on 200 female traders, where 22% of the subjects believed that STD's can be treated by indigenous methods. 40% of their study subjects believed that praying to God can treat the disease.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that there are several misconceptions and partial knowledge in college going students too. The education system plays a major role in imparting scientific knowledge and addressing the stigma and misconceptions about AIDS and STD's. Novel methods of imparting education should be incorporated in the curriculum, such as minor role plays, group discussion with teachers, use of pictures and colorful material on symptoms and prevention of STD's/AIDS etc. There is also a strong need to rise the awareness of

teachers and students on STD's/AIDS by conducting a workshop and by designing proper study material to the students of coming generations. Role of media can also be improved by giving advertisements or by designing serials which can impart necessary education to the students.

Limitations

Convenience sampling was done and study was conducted on a small sample size of 200 students belonging to only one junior college.

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