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RESEARCH PAPER

A study on awareness of HIV/AIDS among students in Annamalai University

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ABSTRACT

HIV is a virus that causes AIDS. It enters the body and infects immune system cells in the body, causing more copies of the virus to be produced. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. HIV/AIDS is becoming an important problem in India and south Asia. Young and reproductive age groups of the population are at the centre of the HIV epidemic in India. Since 1997, the disease has been spreading rapidly among intravenous drug users and commercial sex workers (Shankar *et al.*, 2009). In this study a sample of 100 respondents was randomly selected from the students of engineering faculty in Annamalai University. Personal interview method was adopted for data collection and analysis was done through frequency and percentage. The result revealed that all respondents (100%) had heard about HIV/AIDS. It has been observed that majority of respondents (95%) had agreed that sex with multiple partner was a source of HIV infection to people. In this paper an attempt has been made to assess the knowledge about health problems of HIV/AIDS and preventive methods among students.

Key Words : Awareness, HIV/AIDS, Among students

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AIDS is a serious illness that slowly attacks and destroys the body's immune system. The result is that the body becomes vulnerable to infections and cancers which are not so common in population. AIDS. *i.e.* Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is not hereditary and is characterized by a number of symptoms occurring together. It is the HIV that is Human Immune Deficiency Virus that finally leads to AIDS. All body fluids could contain HIV, but its presence is particularly high in blood, semen of man, vaginal and cervical secretions of women. A person infected with the virus becomes a carrier of HIV and can infect others. When AIDS finally sets in the person may have several signs and symptoms, such as fever, loss of weight, diarrhea, and severe fatigue. The only way to prevent HIV/AIDS is to prevent behaviour which would make a person vulnerable and which would expose him/her to the risk of HIV infection.

Colleges and school children of today are exposed to the risk of being victims of HIV/AIDS - which was quite unknown to their predecessors a few decades ago. Programme managers and policy makers have often recommended that schools can act at the center point for disseminating information and education on HIV/AIDS. Hence, school education has been described as a social vaccine, and it can serve as a powerful preventive tool. In India, there is a wide gap between the inputs in the HIV/AIDS curriculum for schools and the actual education that is imparted. As children

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are a valuable resource for the future of a country, it is imperative that they be equipped with ample amount of information so as to protect themselves and their counterparts from falling a prey to this still-an-incurable killer disease.

The study of Singh *et al.* (1997) conducted a study among college in Pune, India found that women were less knowledgeable than their male counterparts meaning that men were more knowledgeable about the hazard of HIV/AIDS than women. He reported that although students were knowledgeable about the role of sexual contact, blood transfusion, infected needles, they had misconceptions about the transmission of HIV through casual contact. Deshmukh *et al.* (1998) and Harding *et al.* (1999), revealed that their respondents were knowledgeable about transmission and symptomlogy, but there were misconceptions about the mode of HIV transmission. The study of Maswanya *et al.* (2000) assessed knowledge and attitude concerning HIV infection and individuals with AIDS among 383 females students attending colleges in Nagasaki, Japan. Finding showed that mean age of participants was 18, 8 years, the main source of information for AIDS awareness as reported by the students was the mass media. Students demonstrated a high level of knowledge concerning and prejudices about people having HIV/AIDS.

Objectives of the study :

- To study the socio-economic and demographic profile of the respondents.
- To assess the knowledge about HIV/AIDS among students.
- To examine their knowledge about health problems of HIV/AIDS and preventive methods

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study by adopting simple random sampling technique 100 respondents were selected. The respondents were the students of engineering faculty in Annamalai University. The data required for the study was collected using a detailed survey schedule through personal interview with the respondents. After the field survey, all the schedules were thoroughly scrutinized to check the inconsistencies in responses and were edited. Then all the data collected were coded and entered into the computer and processed to get the required tables, and analysis was done through tools such as mean, frequency and per cent.

RESULTS AND REMONSTRATION

It has been observed from the Table 1 that 52 per cent of respondents came from rural place, whereas, 48 of them came from urban area. Regarding religion, it has been observed that the majority of the respondents (70%) were Hindu, 23 per cent of respondents were Christian, whereas, only 7 per cent of them were Muslim. Regarding educational course, it has been observed that 46 per cent of the respondents were studying M.Sc. IT course, 42 per cent of the respondents were studying B.E., whereas, the remaining 12 per cent of them were studying M.Sc. (Soft Eng.). Regarding father's occupation, 32 per cent were doing business, 26 per cent were farmers while 24 and 18 per cent were clerks and teachers, respectively. Regarding

Table 1 : Distribution of respondents by socio-economic and demographic status

	No. of respondents / per cent
Place of residence	
Rural	52
Urban	48
Total	100
Religion	
Hindu	70
Christian	23
Muslim	7
Total	100
Course studying	
Msc .IT	46
Msc(SE)	12
B.E	42
Total	100
Occupation of father	
Farmer	26
Clerks	24
Teacher	18
Business	32
Total	100
Annual family income	
50,000 – 1lac	42
1lac-1.5lac	36
1.5lac-2lac	22
Total	100
Age of respondents	
17-20	12
21-24	44
25-28	33
29-32	11
Total	100
Sex of respondents	
Male	80
Female	20
Total	100

Mean age of respondents = 22 years;
Annual mean income = Rs., 115000

annual family income it has been observed that majority of respondents (42 %) had earned the income of Rs. 50, 000 – 1 lac, 36 per cent of the respondents had earned the income of Rs. 1 lac - 1.5 lac. The remaining 22 per cent had earned Rs. 1.5 to 2 lac. The annual mean income is Rs. 1,15,000. Regarding current age, it has been observed that 44 per cent of the respondents were in the age group of 21-24 years, while 33 and 12 per cent of respondents were in the age group of 25-28 years and 17-20 years, respectively. The remaining 11 per cent of respondents were in 29-32 age group. The mean age of respondents is found to be 22 years. Regarding sex of respondents, it has been observed that 80 per cent of respondents were males while 20 per cent of them were females.

The above table reveals that all respondents (100%) had awareness about HIV/AIDS. Majority of respondents (90%) had stated news paper as a source of knowledge on HIV. While above 80 per cent of the respondents had stated television, magazines and friends as the source of knowledge. Only 62 per cent of them had stated radio as source of knowledge on HIV/AIDS. Regarding knowledge about source of infection of HIV to people, it has been observed that majority of respondents (95%) had agreed that sex with multiple partner and sex with someone having HIV/AIDS as source of HIV/AIDS infection to people. While, 90 per cent of them had agreed infected needles, infected blood and having sex without condom as the source of infection of HIV/AIDS, only 50 to 60 per cent of them had agreed barber shops and having sex with worker as source of infection of HIV/AIDS to people.

Regarding the knowledge about health problems of HIV/

Table 2 : Distribution of the respondents by their knowledge about HIV/AIDS

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS	Response		
	Yes	No	Total
Have you ever heard about HIV/ AIDS	100	-	100
Source of knowledge on HIV/AIDS through radio	62	38	100
Through TV	86	14	100
Through news paper	90	10	100
Through magazine	84	16	100
Heard about HIV/AIDS from friends	82	18	100
Knowledge on infection of HIV/AIDS to people	Yes	No	Total
Sex with multiple partner	95	5	100
Sex with someone having HIV	95	5	100
Infected needless	90	10	100
Infected blood	90	10	100
Sex with sex worker	60	40	100
Sex without condom	90	10	100
Barber shop	52	48	100

Table 3 : Analysis on awareness of health problems of HIV/AIDS and preventing methods

Health problems of HIV/AIDS	Response		
	Yes	No	Total
Poor appetite	70	30	100
Rapid weight loss	90	10	100
Genital sores	75	25	100
Fever/night sweats	85	15	100
Short term memory loss	80	20	100
Diarrhea	60	40	100
Preventive methods of HIV/AIDS	Yes	No	Total
Having only one sex partner	62	38	100
Abstaining from per/extra marital sex	55	45	100
Using condom during sex	90	10	100
Using sterile needles and syringes	82	18	100
Avoiding people who are HIV positive	70	30	100
Avoiding sex workers	55	45	100

AIDS, it has been found that majority of the respondents(80 to 90%) had stated rapid weight loss, fever/night sweats and short term memory loss as problems due to HIV/AIDS, whereas 70 to 75 per cent of them had stated poor appetite and genital sores as health problems of HIV/AIDS. Regarding the knowledge about preventive methods of HIV/AIDS, it has been observed that higher proportion of the respondents (80 to 90%) had suggested using sterile needles and syringes, and using condom during sex, whereas, 60 to 70 per cent of them had suggested having one sex partner and avoiding sex with HIV infected persons to prevent HIV/AIDS infection, Among the respondents 55 per cent had suggested abstaining pre/extra marital sex and avoiding sex workers as the preventive methods of HIV/AIDS infection. Shen *et al*. (1999); Irfan *et al*. (2002); Farid and Chaudry (2003); Shaikh and Asad (2001); Shaikh *et al*. (2003) and Sikander *et al*. (2000) also warked on the related topic.

Conclusion :

From the above study, it has been found that 52 per cent of respondents came from rural place and majority of the respondents (70%) belonged to Hindu religion. The mean income of families was Rs. 1,15,000 and mean age of respondents was 22 years. Majority of the respondents (80%) was males. It has been found that all the respondents (100%) had knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Majority of respondents had stated newspaper and television as the source of knowledge on HIV/AIDS. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (95%) had possessed wider knowledge about the source of infection of HIV/AIDS. Majority of respondents had stated rapid weight loss, fever/night sweats and short term memory loss as health problems due to the infection of HIV/AIDS. Majority of them had suggested using condom during sex and using sterile needles/syringes and avoiding sex with HIV infected persons as the prevention methods of HIV/AIDS infection. It has been concluded that awareness on HIV/AIDS and related health problems among the students was high and also their suggestions to prevent the infection of HIV/AIDS to other people are good. However, the prevalence of some misconceptions about HIV/AIDS infection among the students must be eliminated by conducting awareness camps, workshops and seminars which will modify their behaviour to certain extent.

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