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AWARENESS ABOUT HIV/AIDS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN CHENNAI, TAMILNADU: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

Sriram Chandramohan and Jain Raj. R

Scientist, Department of Environmental Health Engineering, Sri Ramachandra
University, Chennai, India.

PG Student of Public Health, Department of Environmental Health Engineering,
Sri Ramachandra University, Chennai, India.

Abstract:

Background: Early phase of youth is a delicate period due to inadequate mental, physical and social maturity. An incomplete psychological development during this period and peer group influence results in adopting risky behaviour making them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Objectives: To assess the awareness regarding HIV/AIDS among college students in Chennai.

Methods: We approached the Arts and Science College for conducting HIV awareness program for the students. We requested all the students to take a sheet of paper and write whatever questions they have in their mind about HIV/AIDS. **Results:** There were about 400 students, 200 Arts group students and 200 Science group students, out of 400 students 275 were males and 125 were females. All the students were heard about HIV/AIDS, Condom and Sexual contact, but most of them are not aware of mode of transmission and preventive measures.

Conclusion: The findings of the study show that Even though all the college students have heard about HIV/AIDS. Most of them are not aware about the mode of transmission and preventive measures. Young people are more vulnerable and are less covered by HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. These study results can be useful in directing future efforts at creating awareness about HIV/AIDS.

KEY WORDS:

HIV awareness, College Students, Chennai, Tamilnadu.

INTRODUCTION:

HIV has rapidly established itself throughout the world over the past three decades. The youth cohort is one of the most vulnerable groups as far as risk of HIV/AIDS is concerned. Globally, almost of a quarter of people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is under the age of 25 years [1]. In India, 35% of all reported AIDS cases are among the age group of 15-24 years, indicating the vulnerability of the younger population to the epidemic [2].

Furthermore, the epidemic is moving from high-risk groups such as sex workers to the general population and from urban to rural populations [3]. Of the estimated people living with HIV, 60% reside in rural areas [4]. Though prevalence of HIV has an uneven distribution in India, South India, and North-eastern states have predominant number of reported cases [5]. To control this epidemic an overall awareness need to be created in general population and especially high risk groups. HIV/AIDS epidemic is worst among the youths as they tend to experiment with practice of risky behavior often with little

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awareness of the danger. This group is more vulnerable due to incomplete social, emotional and psychological development resulting in risky behavior.[6, 7] Many of them are not prepared to make safe decisions at this age, and without adequate parental monitoring they may be especially susceptible to risky behaviour. Peer group influence paramounts in this period of growth and hence, vulnerability to HIV also increases in individuals with friends who support risky behaviour We need to further concentrate on this younger generation especially the college going students as they represent the country's future. Due to an increase in the incidence of HIV in this younger generation the economy of country would be affected considerably unless further steps are taken to prevent the transmission of this dreadful disease. The young populations are the manpower and resource for an economically stable country. Hence, this population being affected means loss of human resources thereby resulting in downfall of economy.[8] Since prevention is the key to AIDS control, empowerment of youth with knowledge about high-risk behaviour and its ominous relation with HIV is one of the most effective tool to control this pandemic [7].

AIM

A cross sectional study on awareness related to HIV/AIDS, among College Students in Chennai.

OBJECTIVES

This study was done to assess the awareness regarding HIV/AIDS among college students in Chennai.

Materials & Methods:

STUDY DESIGN: A Cross sectional study.

STUDY AREA: Arts and Science College in Poonamalle Block of Tiruvallur District.

STUDY POPULATION: Undergraduate Arts and Science Students.

We approached the Arts and Science College for conducting HIV awareness program for the students. We approached the Principal for permission, since it was awareness program permission was granted to our team. We separated the boys and girls to have more open discussion and the program was conducted by Male trainers to boys and Female Trainers to girls to enable supportive environment for them. We requested the teachers to leave the room so that students can have open discussion with us. First we would like to know their awareness level before we start our program, we requested all the students to take a sheet of paper and write whatever questions they have in their mind about HIV/AIDS. We assured the students that don't write your name and the questions asked by you will be maintained confidentially. The students were too much enthusiastic in writing the questions. We kept small cardboard boxes on the corner of each row, once the students are done with writing questions, we asked the students to put in that cardboard boxes. We played a video which lasted for 15 minutes and it contained basic information about HIV/AIDS, Mode of transmission of HIV and prevention of HIV.

After that we collected all the questionnaires from the cardboard boxes, we started reading the questions loudly and clarifying the questions in front of the students. Repeated questions were avoided to save time.

Results:

There were about 400 students, 200 Arts group students and 200 Science group students, out of 400 students 275 were males and 125 were females. All the students were heard about HIV/AIDS, Condom, and Sexual contact.

Table: 1: Questions asked by Students on HIV/AIDS:

| S.NO | Questions | Questions asked by no of students |
|------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Why no medicines are available for AIDS? | 05 |
| 2 | If you have sex with more girls, will it cause HIV? | 25 |
| 3 | Do we need to avoid sex to prevent from HIV? | 11 |
| 4 | If we have sex with HIV Infected persons by using a condom, what is the probability of getting infected? | 10 |
| 5 | Is HIV spread by both gender or only by male or Female? | 15 |
| 6 | Does HIV spread by using the swimming pool? | 18 |
| 7 | How can we prevent ourselves from HIV? | 12 |
| 8 | When HIV will come? | 14 |
| 9 | At what age does HIV come? | 21 |
| 10 | Can we prevent HIV by using condom? | 15 |
| 11 | How to use condom? | 40 |
| 12 | What do you mean by safe sex? | 05 |
| 13 | How HIV is caused? | 13 |
| 14 | Does HIV spread by using the same plate for eating food? | 20 |
| 15 | Can we share the cool drinks with HIV patients? | 08 |
| 16 | Is HIV an airborne Infection? | 04 |
| 17 | Can we share the shaving blade with HIV patients? | 20 |
| 18 | How can we Identify and confirm if a person is infected with HIV? | 25 |
| 19 | If we have sex with wife do we get HIV? | 03 |
| 20 | What are the signs and symptoms of HIV? | 35 |
| 21 | Can we cure HIV completely? | 18 |
| 22 | Can Masturbation cause HIV? & what are the side effects of Masturbation? | 33 |
| 23 | If we use condom to prevent from HIV, How can we have babies? | 07 |
| 24 | How can we prevent HIV from Mother to child? | 06 |
| 25 | Does HIV spread by sharing needles? | 09 |
| 26 | Does HIV spread by Blood? | 08 |

It clearly showed that many students are not aware and wanting to know about using a condom, signs and symptoms of HIV, about masturbation and its effects, having a sex with multiple sex partners and HIV, Identification and confirmation of HIV cases and common age for getting HIV (Table: 2 & Figure 1)

It also shows that many students are not aware about causes and spread of HIV (Table 3 & Figure 2). Some of the students are not aware and wanting to know about signs and symptoms of HIV and Confirmation Methods for HIV (Table 4 & Figure 3).

Even some of the students are not ware about prevention measures for HIV, it has been clearly shown below in the Table 5 & Figure 4.

There are lots of misconceptions existing among the college students in terms of HIV/AIDS which are shown below in the Table 6 & Figure 5.

Table 2: More Common Questions about HIV/AIDS by Students:

| S.NO | Questions | Questions asked by no of students |
|------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | How to use condom? | 40 |
| 2 | What are the signs and symptoms of HIV? | 35 |
| 3 | Can Masturbation cause HIV? & what are the side effects of Masturbation? | 33 |
| 4 | If you have sex with more girls, will it cause HIV? | 25 |
| 5 | How can we Identify and confirm if a person is infected with HIV? | 25 |
| 6 | At what age does HIV come? | 21 |

Figure: 1

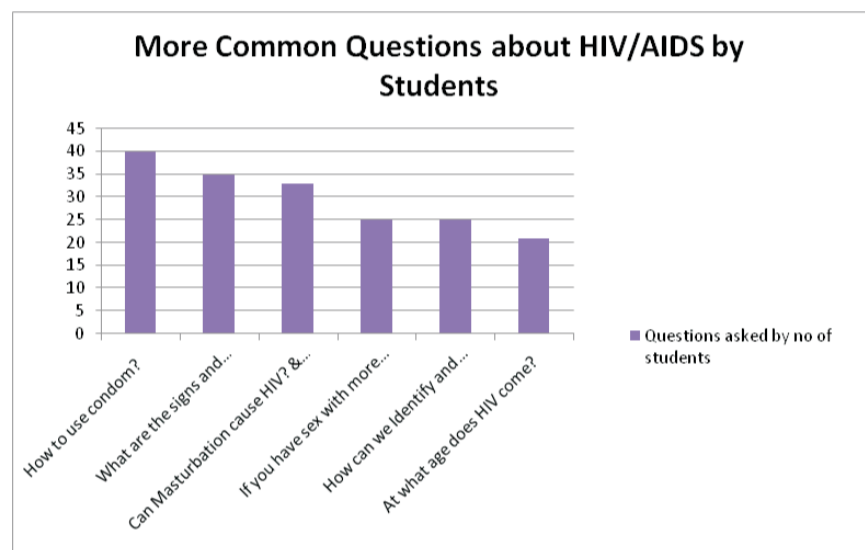


Table 3: Lack of awareness among students about Causes / Spread of HIV:

| S.NO | Questions | Questions asked by no of students |
|------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | If you have sex with more girls, will it cause HIV? | 25 |
| 2 | If we have sex with HIV Infected persons by using a condom, what is the probability of getting infected? | 10 |
| 3 | When HIV will come? | 14 |
| 4 | At what age does HIV come? | 21 |
| 5 | How HIV is caused? | 13 |
| 6 | Is HIV an airborne Infection? | 04 |
| 7 | Does HIV spread by sharing needles? | 09 |
| 8 | Does HIV spread by Blood? | 08 |

Figure: 2

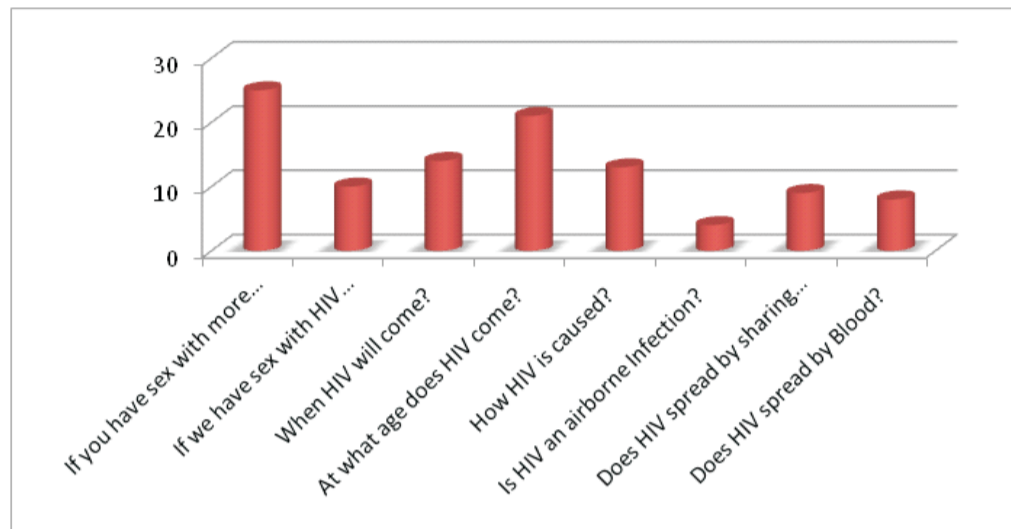


Table 4: Lack of awareness among students about Signs & Symptoms of HIV:

| S.NO | Questions | Questions asked by no of students |
|------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | What are the signs and symptoms of HIV? | 35 |
| 2 | How can we Identify and confirm if a person is infected with HIV? | 25 |

Figure: 3

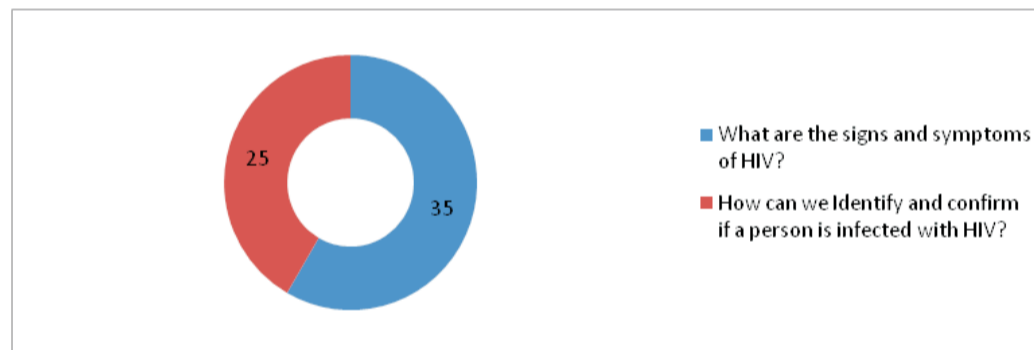


Table: 5: Lack of awareness among students about Prevention of HIV:

| S.NO | Questions | Questions asked by no of students |
|------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | How can we prevent ourselves from HIV? | 12 |
| 2 | Can we prevent HIV by using condom? | 15 |
| 3 | How to use condom? | 40 |
| 4 | What do you mean by safe sex? | 05 |
| 5 | How can we prevent HIV from Mother to child? | 06 |

Figure: 4

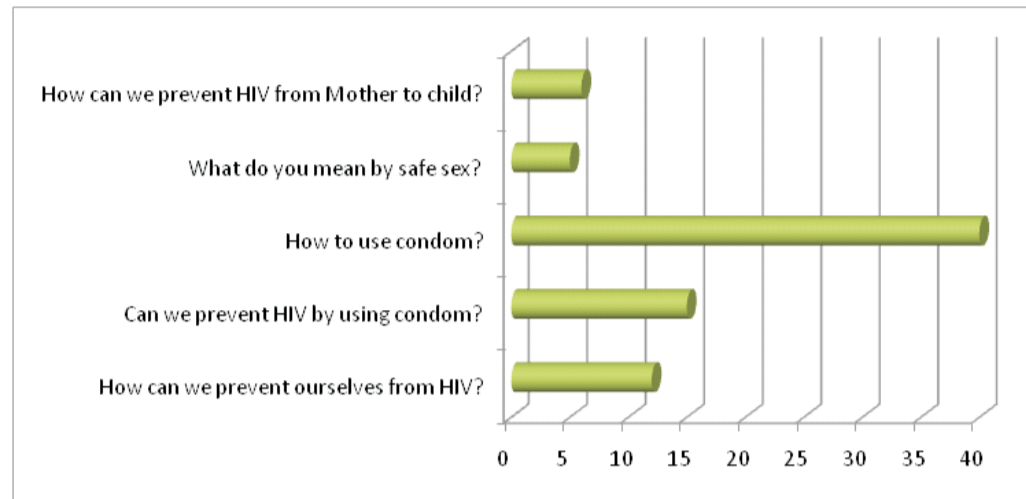
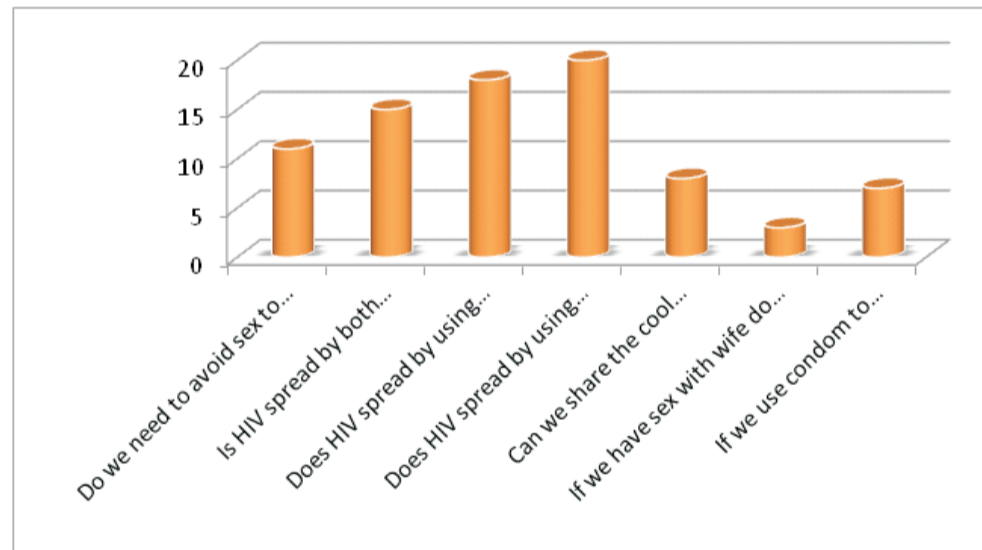


Table: 6: Misconception Existing among students about HIV:

| S.NO | Questions | Questions asked by no of students |
|------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Do we need to avoid sex to prevent from HIV? | 11 |
| 2 | Is HIV spread by both gender or only by male or Female? | 15 |
| 3 | Does HIV spread by using the swimming pool? | 18 |
| 4 | Does HIV spread by using the same plate for eating food? | 20 |
| 5 | Can we share the cool drinks with HIV patients? | 08 |
| 6 | If we have sex with wife do we get HIV? | 03 |
| 7 | If we use condom to prevent from HIV, How can we have babies? | 07 |

Figure: 5



DISCUSSION:

The alarming rate of spread of HIV, lack of curative therapy and vaccine to prevent it mandates a need for ongoing and consistent health education programme. AIDS prevention largely depends on health education and behavioural changes based on AIDS awareness, particularly among young adults who are prone to high risk behaviour.

Before we undertake such kind of awareness programme, we need to know the existing level of awareness of the target population in those areas. An evaluation of HIV awareness is required for two reasons. One to get baseline epidemiological data regarding the existing knowledge and attitude prior to implementing an awareness programme and another reason is to assess the effect or reach of educative campaigns [7]. The current study showed that all the students have heard about HIV but low levels of awareness in terms of cause, spread and prevention. Similar findings were reported by the Behaviour Surveillance Survey (2006) [9] across the country. Very fewer students were aware that HIV infection can be transmitted by sharing razor in our study. Kore et al found a better response with 85% of males and 64% of female college students who were aware that HIV spreads by sharing razor.[10] this needs to be dealt more seriously since using razor is one of the daily needs of a male gender. Hence, awareness has to be created among the mass about this mode to prevent the infection by this route.

In our study there are about of Misconception among students about the spread of HIV. There are wrong beliefs that HIV could be transmitted by various means such as mosquito bites, sharing meals, casual contact, and using public swimming pools and toilets.[8] Commonest misconceptions about HIV transmission identified in our study was mingling with HIV patients. Chatterjee et al found school children having various misconceptions such as hand shaking, kissing, sharing toilets and exchanging clothes [11]. The current study shows that Even though the students have heard about HIV/AIDS but many of them are not ware about mode of transmission and preventive measures. Most of the college students want to know about how to use condom and masturbation and its side effects.

CONCLUSION:

Our study explored one of the important measures to prevent HIV/AIDS, i.e., awareness of the disease. The study was a survey at one period in time so it has the limitations of a cross-sectional study. However, the findings of the study show that Even though all the college students have heard about HIV/AIDS. Most of them are not aware about the mode of transmission and preventive measures. Young people are more vulnerable and are less covered by HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. These study results can be useful in directing future efforts at creating awareness about HIV/AIDS.

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Sriram Chandramohan

Scientist, Department of Environmental Health Engineering, Sri Ramachandra University, Chennai, India.

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