

Awareness and Knowledge about HIV/AIDS among Panjab University Students

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Abstract:

Background: HIV is a behavior related disease in which awareness and knowledge with regard to HIV and AIDS could influence the course of its spread. The National Behavioral Surveillance Survey (BSS), conducted by NACO indicates the median age at first sex as 21 years for males and 18 years for females in the entire country. Panjab University has a large number of students coming from neighboring states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab studying in its various departments. The University Institute of Legal Studies, University Institute of Engineering and Technology and the Dr. Harvansh Singh Judge Dental Institute have a major proportion of these students between the ages of 18 to 24, coming from rural as well as urban backgrounds. This indicates a high vulnerability of India's young adults towards HIV and AIDS.

Aims and objectives: This paper focuses on assessing the awareness and knowledge of young university students about AIDS, related terms and issues.

Material and Method: Using the simple random sampling technique, a structured questionnaire was designed and used to assess the knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS. The participants comprised of under-graduate and post-graduate students, forty males and forty females from various departments of the university.

Results: While males have correct knowledge about HIV/AIDS, females have a lot of misconceptions. While 82.5 per cent females responded that the disease is incurable only 55 per cent males responded alike. The findings suggest a major misconception about the spread of AIDS through mosquito bite and touching. Data also reveals that 47.5 per cent females and only 25 per cent males knew about usage of disposable needles and syringes as methods of prevention.

Conclusion: The study emphasizes on more effective dissemination of HIV and AIDS related literature among youth in an accessible and engaging fashion.

Keywords: HIV, AIDS, awareness, knowledge.

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One of the serious global public health problems worldwide today is the Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. An estimated forty million people are living with HIV and about two million of these die of AIDS. About 2.7 million are newly infected with the virus each year. According to UNAIDS [12], most vulnerable age group prone to HIV and AIDS is 15-25 years. Since no effective treatment or vaccine against HIV and AIDS is yet available, awareness is the best strategy to prevent the spread of the disease. Previous research among Kerala students indicates gaps in knowledge among boys and girls, and between rural and urban students (Lal, Sarma, Thankappan & Vasan, 2000) [7] suggesting the need for targeting girls and rural areas in the national AIDS campaigns.

Rao, Palani, Iyer and Sathiyasekaran (2011) [11] conducted a cross-sectional study on 400 randomly selected undergraduate students in South Chennai. Results indicated that students who did not indulge in risky behavior had better knowledge about cause and prevention whereas knowledge about modes of transmission was more among those indulging in risky behavior. Knowledge about treatment was low and the popular source of information was Television.

Rai, Singh, Dutta and Tripathi (2009) [10] conducted a prevention and transmission of HIV/AIDS awareness study on 300 research scholars at Banaras Hindu University identified on the role of gender and discipline. Female students have shown greater awareness in all aspects of the disease. In comparison to Arts students the Science students were more aware regarding persons having STD are at more risk for HIV infection. Jindal (2013) [4] conducted a cross-sectional survey of students aged 15-20 years to assess the level of awareness of pre-university students regarding HIV and AIDS. The survey aimed to assess the knowledge of disease regarding etiology, mode of transmission and prevention. While 91% of students knew about AIDS, its modes of transmission and prevention only 64% knew that AIDS is more among IV drug users and thought that it can spread through direct contact.

Kumar, Pore and Patil (2012) [6] conducted a knowledge, awareness and prevention interventional study among municipal corporation high school students in Pune. Results indicated a significant decrease in knowledge about misconceptions and increase in knowledge about modes of transmission and prevention after the film intervention. Another community based cross-sectional study was conducted among youths aged 15-24 in rural areas of

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Saurashtra region of Gujarat, India. The study found age, education, occupation and mass media exposure as the major determinants of Knowledge about HIV/AIDS. It also revealed that two-fifths of rural youth lack basic knowledge about the disease where literacy and media exposure can play a major role. (Yadav, Makwana, Vadera, Dhaduk&Gandha, 2011) [13]. Research also suggests greater need for education to address stigmatizing attitudes about HIV/AIDS, gaps in knowledge and awareness about HIV related health resources (Agarwal & Sushma, 2013 [1]; Pramanik, Chartier and Koopman, 2006). [9] Another study conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of peer education interventions in developing countries published between 1990 and 2006. Meta-analysis indicated that peer education programs in developing countries are moderately effective at improving behavioral outcomes but show no significant impact on biological outcomes. Further research is needed to determine factors that maximize the likelihood of program success.

(Medley, Kennedy, Reilly, & Sweat, 2009) [8]

Ebeniro (2010) [2] studied the knowledge and beliefs about HIV and AIDS among male and female students of Nigerian universities. The study investigated the role of traditional and cultural societal norms on the behavioral patterns among youth. The sample comprised of 162 males and 162 females in the age-group 20-24 in 3 Tertiary Institutions. The target groups comprise those that practice risky behavior, drug addiction and premarital sex which makes them prone to HIV infection. The results indicate that socio-economic factors, culture and tradition play a significant role in the differences between female and male perceptions of HIV and AIDS.

Fujikawa and Ogawa (2013) [3] examined the Japanese student's level of awareness and understanding of AIDS and its related diseases. A total of 406 Japanese undergraduates took the survey related to AIDS transmission and role of media in disseminating information about AIDS. The results showed that less than half the respondents had correct knowledge about modes of transmission about the modes of AIDS transmission. The respondents ranked T.V. and education at schools as the as the most preferred information sources about AIDS while internet lagged behind.

Khalid, Eltayeb and Elbadawi (2013) [5] conducted a cross-sectional study among the students of University of Kassala, Sudan. Data was collected from 395 students through a self-administered questionnaire. Among these 186 (46.8%) were males and 210 (53.2%) were females with ages ranging from 17 to 35 years (mean 20.45 + 2.89). The study revealed that students had knowledge about the communicability, infectious nature and transmission modes of AIDS but had misconceptions about the symptoms and preventivemeasures. The study emphasizes that as students play an important role in the dissemination of knowledge and raising awareness among their families and communities more efforts to developing the two factors should be exerted.

The above studies bring forth a dearth of AIDS awareness studies in the northern part of India. Panjab University is an education hub in the north catering to the states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir which are witnessing a steady increase in drug use and HIV/AIDS cases. This prompted the researchers to undertake an

awareness study on the students from various departments of Panjab University.

I. METHOD

The study was conducted using a descriptive survey design. The participants in the study were Panjab University campus undergraduate and post-graduate students comprising of 40 boys and 40 girls. The participants were selected through simple random sampling. Panjab University has a large number of students coming from neighboring states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab studying in its various departments. The University Institute of Legal Studies, University Institute of Engineering and Technology and the Dental Institute have a large number of students coming from rural as well as urban backgrounds. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire.

II. RESULTS

The data suggest that a large number of students come from urban areas and nuclear families. The type of schools the students attended shows a mixed trend. While males have correct knowledge about AIDS being a non-communicable disease there are some misconceptions among females. While 82.5 per cent females responded that the disease is incurable only 55 per cent males responded alike. The findings suggest a major misconception about the spread of AIDS through mosquito bite and touching. Table 2 shows that 47.5 per cent females and only 25 per cent males knew about usage of disposable needles and syringes as methods of prevention. Table 2 also suggests television with 40 per cent boys and per cent girls and internet with 3.5 per cent boys and 27.5 per cent girls responding in favor of them as the most popular sources for collecting information about HIV and AIDS.

Table 1: Showing demographic information of the participants

<i>PARAMETERS</i>	<i>MALES</i>	<i>FEMALES</i>
Age		
20-23	37.5	60
24-27	62.5	40
Family Background		
Urban	77.5	85
Rural	22.5	15
Type of Family		
Nuclear	60	82.5
Joint	35	17.5
Other	05	00
Type of School		
Convent	7.5	7.5
Govt.	12.5	2.5
Other	80	90
Educational Status		
Under-graduates	40	55
Post-graduates	60	45

Table 2: Showing correct responses (in %) about knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS:

	MALES	FEMALES
General information about HIV/AIDS		
Communicable Disease	00	2.5
Damages Immune System	2.5	22.5
Incurable	7.5	10
Lacking in Clarity	75	65
Abbreviations		
HIV	57.5	90
AIDS	82.5	92.5
STI	40	55
STD	62.5	82.5
RTI	05	15
Methods of Prevention		
Protected Sex	72.5	67.5
Safe Blood Transfusion	12.5	20
Unused Needles & Syringes	25	47.5
Pre-natal screening of pregnant women	00	05
Misconceptions regarding modes of transmission		
Transmission through mosquito bite	87.5	90
Transmission through touching	37.5	57.5
Transmission through sharing food	12.5	40
Transmission through interaction	00	05
Sources of information		
School	2.5	7.5
Books	05	35
TV	40	35
Radio	7.5	7.5
Newspaper	25	12.5
Medical Posters	12.5	10
Seminars	00	10
Media	7.5	12.5
Internet	35	27.5
Other Sources	05	2.5

III. DISCUSSION

We found that many of the students at Panjab University belong to urban areas and come from nuclear families. While male students had correct knowledge about the spread of the disease some misconceptions are prevalent among females. One of the major misconceptions is about the spread of AIDS through mosquito bite and touching. This result is consistent with prior studies indicating gaps in knowledge among boys and girls, and between rural and urban students (Lal, Sarma, Thankappan & Vasana, 2000) [7] suggesting the need for targeting girls and rural areas in the national AIDS campaigns.

This emphasizes the need of spreading awareness about HIV and AIDS among university students. While mass media sources such as T.V. and internet are the most popular approaches to disseminating information about HIV and AIDS there is absence of targeted approach towards spreading knowledge about the disease. This as well as previous research also suggests greater need for education to

address stigmatizing attitudes about HIV/AIDS, gaps in knowledge and awareness about HIV related health resources (Agarwal & Sushma, 2013 [1]; Kumar, Pore and Patil, 2012 [6]; Pramanik, Chartier and Koopman, 2006) [9].

The study emphasizes on the need for more effective dissemination for HIV and AIDS related literature through seminars, conferences, handouts for easy accessibility. The misconceptions surrounding HIV and AIDS call for better dissemination of literature about the disease in an easily accessible, effective and engaging manner. Only correct knowledge and awareness about AIDS can help in dispelling the various misconceptions, myths and stigmas associated with it.

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