

Awareness of HIV and Importance of HIV awareness programs in youths

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HIV AIDS is spreading very rapidly throughout Indian subcontinent. One of the main risk factor in spread of HIV is lack of awareness among masses especially youths who are sexually active. Sex awareness education can play an important role in controlling the spread of disease. We had done a survey in government preuniversity collage to check the awareness regarding HIV AIDS among youths and then we gave a awareness lecture and same questionnaire was again asked to filled to check the impact of awareness lectures. Findings revealed that, there was much ignorance among youths. Awareness programs showed significant improvement.

Key words: HIV, AIDS, HIV awareness.

Introduction

The HIV epidemic is growing silently in India over the past decade, with the virus spreading mainly through sexual intercourse. All known routes of transmission are known in India, and increase in HIV positive cases has been noted among prostitutes, STD clinic patients, blood donors, and IV drug users.

In 2006, UNAIDS estimated that 34.1 million to 47.1 million people worldwide were living with HIV. India accounts for roughly half of Asia's HIV prevalence.¹ In four states of southern India, surveys found an HIV prevalence of 14.5% among female sex workers (Ramesh et al., 2008).

There is an estimate of 5.7 million HIV-infected people in India as compared with 5.5 million in South Africa – captured wide attention. India harbors one sixth of world's population and is a home for perhaps one in every eight people with HIV infection. According to Denis Broun, the country coordinator for the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in India, "It is not possible to control the overall HIV epidemic if it is out of control in India.

Whatever success is recorded in India will immediately have an impact on the overall world situation just because of the sheer numbers. The estimate for India is based primarily on anonymous testing data from public clinics for prenatal care and for patients in high-risk groups or with sexually transmitted infections⁽²⁾ presently the surveillance sites are expanding and the numbers may be expanding.^(2&3) The most rapid and well-documented spread of infection has occurred in Mumbai and the State of Tamil Nadu. In India HIV prevalence has reached 36.8% in sex workers, 21.2% in STD

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patients, and 2.3% in women seen in antenatal clinics (2006) ⁴.

India is the second most populous country in the world, after China with less than 1% of the global landmass, If HIV spreads at this pace it is estimated that India will have more new cases of HIV infection per year than any single country, and probably the largest number of HIV-infected population more than that of South America, Africa, and Australia combined together. Whatever happens in India will therefore have a major impact upon the global pandemic of HIV and AIDS.

A variety of factors expose young people to HIV, most important includes lack of HIV information, education and services. The population has been largely ignorant of HIV. Talking about sex is taboo, and also efforts by policy makers are not strong to introduce sex education in schools and collages. Greater energy and resources are now being devoted towards educating people regarding HIV.

If the epidemic grows in India and China like it has in sub-Saharan Africa, it may be then too late to hopefully some day defeating it with a vaccine and a cure.

The sad part on part of HIV / AIDS is that still there is no well documented cure for the disease. A lot of medicines are developed to tackle with virus, which is proving effective in increasing the life span of the infected person and in improving his quality of life. There was an effort to develop vaccine for HIV but the development was stopped in clinical trials, a lot more molecules are still in pipeline to tackle the disease. Till we have an effective vaccine or drug, what we have in our hands to tackle with the disease is to spread awareness among mass to stop spread of the disease. The important risk factor in case of HIV/AIDS is ignorance about the disease, which is highly preventable.

It is very important to stop the spread of HIV among youths to bring a control over this epidemic . It has been reported that by the end of 2005 the total number of reported AIDS cases in India was 116,905, of which 34,177 were women. Around a third of these were among people younger than 30 years.⁵

METHODS

To check awareness about the disease among youths a survey was conducted by BMK College of Ayurveda and research centre Belgaum. A questionnaire was distributed among youths of STD XI and XII from a government pre university collage, Belgaum. Meaning of each and every question was explained in local language so that all understands the question properly. After that expert in the subject regarding HIV/AIDS delivered a lecture. Lecture was designed such that it contains answers to all the asked questions. The same questionnaire was given again and asked to fill. Both the pre and post lecture questionnaire was analyzed to check awareness about the disease in youths and to check the effectiveness of awareness program. The survey was carried in 212 students (121 male and 91 females.)

The results put light on level of ignorance present in youths about HIV/AIDS. The post lecture analysis was done to check effectiveness of awareness programs.

RESULTS

Students not knowing full form of HIV and AIDS.

It was shocking to know that 35% girls and 30% boys did not know full form of HIV. Whereas 45% boys and 20% girls did not knew full form of AIDS. This percentage of ignorance was found to be reduced significantly in post lecture analysis. (Table-1 and 2).

Table 1: percentage of students not knowing full form of HIV

	Girls	Boys
Before	35%	30%
After	10%	24%

Table 2: Percentage of students not knowing full form of AIDS

	Girls	Boys
Before	45%	20%
After	20%	17%

Thinks that HIV and AIDS are one and same

It was seen that 57% of girls and 63% boys were thinking that HIV and aids are one and the same. This clearly showed that the youths are still ignorant of the fact that HIV is a virus and AIDS is the condition of the body in which the persons immunity reduces significantly due to HIV infection. A HIV +ve person may not have developed AIDS. If he takes proper care about himself he may delay occurrence of AIDS and can lead about normal life for years even after getting HIV infection. (Table 3)

Table 3: Percentage of thinking that HIV and AIDS are one and the same

	Girls	Boys
Before	57%	63%
After	50%	11%

Believes that HIV can only spread only through prostitute or a infected male

A shocking output of the study was that 62% of boys and 53% of girls were under the impression that AIDS is a disease, which spreads only through a prostitute. This finding clearly points out that still many people think that visiting a brothel is the only cause for spread of AIDS. This fact shows that still there is a taboo attached with person suffering from HIV, which mainly leads to discrimination of HIV +ve people, by the society.

A significant awareness was seen in this regard after the awareness lecture. (Table 4)

Table 4: Percentage of thinking that HIV can only spread only through prostitute or an infected male

	Girls	Boys
Before	62%	53%
After	45%	39%

Believes that use of condoms gives 100% protection from AIDS.

62% of girls and about 77% of boys believed that used of condom provides 100% protection from HIV during sexual intercourse. This clearly means that the youths especially boys were unaware of the fact that there are chances of getting infected in case of accidental rupture of condom. Girls were found to be more aware in this regard as compared to boys.(Table-5)

Table 5: Percentage of students Believing that use of condoms gives 100% protection from AIDS.

	Girls	Boys
Before	62%	77%
After	57%	65%

Believes that AIDS occur only in poor community

It was surprising to know that till today about 10% of girls and 7% of boys believed that AIDS occurs only in poor community. (table 6)

Table 6: Percentage of students Believes that AIDS occur only in poor community

	Girls	Boys
Before	10%	07%
After	07%	07%

Believes that occasional Sexual intercourse with a prostitute (infected with HIV) does not cause AIDS

The most shocking outcome of the study was that 94% of boys believed that occasional sexual intercourse with a prostitute cannot cause AIDS. Whereas the fact is that even a single exposure is sufficient to get infected by the HIV. One can realize from this fact that how prone our youths are to the disease. (Table 7)

Table 7: Percentage of students Believing that occasional Sexual intercourse with a prostitute (infected with HIV) does not cause AIDS

	Girls	Boys
Before	67%	94%
After	51%	39%

Thinks that HIV infected person should be isolated from the family and society to prevent transmission to others.

Youths were seen to be quite well aware of the fact that HIV infected person need not be isolated from society. Only 18 percent of girls and boys believed that HIV +ve person should be isolated from the society. This percentage was seen to be reduced a bit after the awareness program. (Table-8)

Table 8: Percentage of students Thinks that HIV infected person should be isolated from the family and society to prevent transmission to others

	Girls	Boys
Before	18%	18%
After	14%	12%

Knows about post exposure prophylaxis

There are lots of advances in treatment of HIV/AIDS. Now it is possible to avoid infection even after accidental exposure to HIV. This can be achieved by taking antiretroviral drugs within 72 hours after exposure. This is called as post exposure prophylaxis. Half of the girls knew about this, and this increased significantly to 83% after the awareness program.

It is very important that common man knows about this advancement because it will teach them not to panic in case of accidental exposure and it will encourage them to take medical help in time and thus avoid infection.(Table 9)

Table 9: Percentage of students who knows about post exposure prophylaxis

	Girls	Boys
Before	50%	21%
After	83%	42%

Knows that transmission from mother to child can be prevented

One other advance achieved by science is that it is possible to avoid transfusion from mother to child during delivery. Majority of the people were aware of this. This may be because of active publicity regarding this by

government in print and electronic media. This highlights the importance of active awareness program.(Table10)

Table 10: Percentage of students who Knows that transmission from mother to child can be prevented

	Girls	Boys
Before	86%	81%
After	89%	81%

Thinks that AIDS can be cured by some remedies (Advertised by quacks)

Till date there are no medicines, which can cure AIDS. Though many scholars and scientists are working in this direction and few are getting encouraging results also. But no drug is available yet which is proved scientifically to cure AIDS. Many quacks are seen taking undue advantage of ignorance of people by claiming in print media and misguiding people.

A question was asked to the participating yours that did they believe such medicines can cure AIDS. 31% of girls and about 19% boys believed that such medicines can cure AIDS. But after the awareness program this number came down significantly to 22% in girls, no improvement was seen in case of boys as per this question was concerned.(Table11)

Table 11: Percentage of students who Knows thinks that HIV/AIDS can be cured by some of the medicines (advertised by quacks)

	Girls	Boys
Before	31%	19%
After	22%	19%

DISCUSSION

AIDS is a disease in which the major risk factor is ignorance. One who doesn't know is at high risk. And more over youths who are sexually active are at maximum risk. Youth is an age in which sexual attraction is at peak and there is a lot of curiosity about sex and sexual experience. Many a times this curiosity

about sex takes these youths on wrong path. And lack of proper knowledge about sex and sexually transmitted disease adds to the risk. So if one wants to reduce the risk to these youths, only way which exists is to spread awareness among them, which can bring behavioral change in these youths and thus they can act more responsibly.

Girls were found to be more aware than boys in majority of questions. Ignorance of boys is a serious issue because in male dominated society of India the female have less liberty about sexual choice. Males who are ignorant may visit a brothel and get infected which he may further spread to his wife and also to other females with he may have contact thus spreading AIDS.

Awareness program was found to be very effective in creating awareness among participants. A significant improvement was seen in almost all the questions after the awareness program. Though participants didn't become totally aware after a single lecture. This shows that the youths should be given several such sessions of awareness program. It will be much helpful if it is the part of their curriculum and they have to appear and pass the subject on sex awareness and Sexually transmitted disease.

This was a small survey which was done on students of government Pre University College, it is required that survey with a large sample size should be conducted with youths from different strata's of society, which will help in knowing the the level of awareness in different segments .

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