

Knowledge, Attitude, Practice among Adolescents Regarding Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Urban Slums

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexually transmitted diseases are very important health challenges for adolescents. Many national and international governmental and nongovernmental health agencies are running programmes to reduce the incidence of these diseases. We can provide an insight to the reproductive and sexual health needs of adolescents by assessing their knowledge, attitude and practice about these diseases. **Research Question:** What is the level of knowledge, awareness and practice among adolescents regarding sexually transmitted diseases? **Objectives:** To assess the knowledge awareness and practice among adolescents regarding sexually transmitted diseases in an urban slum in Dehradun. **Study Design:** Cross-Sectional **Settings and Participants:** Adolescents belonging to registered families of Chandreshwar Nagar urban slum under the field practice area of Urban Health Training Centre (UHTC) of department of Community Medicine, Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences. **Sample Size:** 166 Adolescents i.e. Males-88 and Females-78. **Study Period:** May 2009 to October 2009

Study Variable: A predesigned, pretested, self-administered questionnaire was used for collecting information on Age, Sex, Knowledge and awareness regarding STDs, etc. **Statistical Analysis:** Standard statistical package i.e. SPSS, Microsoft Excel. **Results:** 51.2% of the adolescents were having knowledge about STD's. Majority of (91.4%) the adolescents knew about AIDS as a type of STD. Their attitude cum practice towards prevention of STD was found to be 72.9% by use of condoms. **Conclusions:** Appropriate health care seeking behaviour and Information Education and Communication (IEC) activities should be promoted.

Key words: Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Adolescents

Introduction:

Adolescents (10-19 years) in India represents over 1/5th of total population. A large number of them are out of school, get married early, work in vulnerable situations, sexually active and are exposed to peer pressure. These factors have serious social, economic and public health implications ⁽¹⁾.

Adolescents are not a homogenous group. Their situation varies by age, sex, marital status, class, religion and cultural context. This calls for interventions that are flexible and responsible for their growth scenario. It is important to influence the health seeking behaviour of the adolescents as their situation will be central in determining India's health, mortality, morbidity and the population growth scenario ⁽¹⁾.

Some of the public health challenges for adolescents include pregnancy, excess risk of maternal and infant mortality, STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections), RTIs (Reproductive Tract Infections) and the rapidly rising incidence of HIV infections in this age group¹.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) or venereal diseases (VD) are the illnesses that have a significant probability of

transmission between humans or animals by means of sexual contact, including vaginal intercourse, oral sex, and anal sex. Increasingly, the term STI is used, as it has a broader range of meaning; a person may be infected and may potentially infect other, without showing signs of disease. Some STIs can also be transmitted via the use of IV drug needle after its use by an infected person, as well as through childbirth or breastfeeding².

Many national and international nongovernmental health agencies are running programmes to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections but the real decline will be evident if there is adequate use of existing health care services. Further STIs are aggravated by factors such as less knowledge and awareness regarding their mode of transmission and spread.

Also at the level of health system, a lack of adequate privacy and confidentiality and the judgemental attitudes of the service providers, who often lack counselling skills, are the barriers that limit access to services¹ so assessing their knowledge, attitude and practice about sexually transmitted infections will provide an insight to the reproductive & sexual health needs of adolescents.

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Material and Methods:

The present cross-sectional study was conducted from May 2009 to October 2009 in an urban slum of Urban Health Training Centre (UHTC), Rishikesh under department of Community Medicine, Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences. All adolescents belonging to registered families of UHTC were enrolled for study i.e. 166 (Males-88, Females-78). A predesigned, pretested, self-administered questionnaire was used after taking informed consent for collecting information by house to house visit. The missed adolescents were personally contacted in second and third visits. The data was compiled, tabulated and analyzed in percentages, statistical test of significance ($p < 0.05$) was used.

Results:

A total of 166 adolescents aged 10-19 years were enrolled and interviewed in the study. The information about their socio-demographic characteristics and knowledge awareness and practice influencing Health Seeking vis a vis STIs was collected and analysed. The findings of the observations are presented in the following tables:

Table 1: Distribution of Adolescents by age and sex

	Male		Female		Total	
	(n=88)		(n=78)		(n=166)	
Age Group						
Early (10 -13 Yrs)	7	14	5	14	12	14
Middle (13 - 16 Yrs)	15	30	12	34	27	32
Late (16 - 19 Yrs)	28	56	18	51	46	54
TOTAL	88	100	78	100	166	100

Majority belonged to 16-19 years of age group (54.2 percent). Though only (51.2 percent) of adolescents had knowledge about STD's.

Table 2: Knowledge regarding STDs among Adolescents

	Male		Female		Total	
	(n=88)		(n=78)		(n=166)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Knowledge Absent	38	43	43	55	81	49
Knowledge Present	50	57	35	45	85	51

Based on the syndromic classification of STIs, the level of awareness regarding type of STDs was 94.1% for AIDS followed by 5.9% for Guprog.

Table 3: Awareness of adolescents about type of STDs

Type of STDs	Male (n=50)		Female (n=35)		Total (n=85)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
AIDS	45	90.0	35	100	80	94.1
	5	10.0	0	0	5	5.9%

Table 4: Attitude of adolescents for Prevention of STDs

Attitude cum Practice	Male (n=50)		Female (n=35)		Total (n=85)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Use of Condoms	37	74.0	25	71.4	62	72.9
Doctor's advice	13	26.0	10	28.6	23	27.1
Self-control	0	0	0	0	0	0

($\chi^2 = 0.07$, $df=1$, $p < 0.05$)

Based on the knowledge and awareness about STDs it was found that their attitude cum practice implicated to prevent STDs was 72.9% by use of condoms, and 27.1% as doctor's advice.

Discussion:

Chandreshwar Nagar an urban slum on the bank of Ganges in Rishikesh under the field practice area of Department of Community Medicine, Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences, with population of 7000 approximately (1400 families) with majority of male working population that is involved in non-agriculture pursuits and migratory in nature. The area is characterized by inadequate lighting, lack of safe drinking water supply, absence of toilet facilities and non-availability of basic social and health services.

Majority of the population belong to Hindu religion with a conservative nature. Issues relating to knowledge, awareness and practices among the adolescents about STDs residing in slum were studied.

The study has revealed 51.2% of adolescents were aware about STDs. This is in accordance with other community based studies⁽³⁻¹³⁾ that revealed the level of awareness ranging between 35.82% and 84.8%, whereas the National Family Health Survey (NFHS –II) for Uttarakhand revealed the state level awareness at 31.9%⁽¹⁴⁾.

Although approximately three fourth of the adolescents were aware that the use of condom as a mode of prevention for the spread of STDs with male and female awareness of 74 percent and 71.4 percent respectively, a rapid household survey under the Reproductive and Child Health Programme showed that in district Baramulla, use of condoms in each intercourse was vouched as a preventive method by 81.3 percent of males and 73.3 percent of

females⁽¹⁵⁾. Other Indian studies have shown similar level of knowledge and awareness of the preventive methods among rural populations. (3, 7, 10, 11, 14, 16).

Conclusions:

Appropriate Health Care Seeking Behaviour and Information Education Communication (IEC) activities should be promoted among adolescents of urban slums.

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