

Knowledge and Understanding of Sexual Health Issues Among Young Indians who Visit a STI Clinic: A Monocentric Study from a Tertiary Care Centre of Eastern India.

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Abstract

Aim: Sexually transmitted diseases [STDs] are infections caused by physical contact. A remarkably greater possibility of sexually transmitted diseases is related to youngsters than older adults. The inappropriate treatment of sexually transmitted diseases causes further problems. The current study aims to evaluate knowledge about sexual health and awareness about sexually transmitted diseases among youth attending a sexually transmitted diseases clinic in India.

Materials and Methods: A total of 50 patients were included in this study who were attending a STD clinic at PRM Medical College & Hospital, Mayurbhanj, Odisha, India. The age group of patients was between 19-25 years. Questions were asked associated with community, literacy, marital status, sexual awareness, knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases and their determent, and potential problems.

Results: Knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases and their potential complications was less except for HIV/AIDS. Even though 46 of the patients knew about condoms 34 of them used it during their sexual intercourse. The main source of awareness regarding sexual diseases is through teachers and social platforms.

Conclusion: The focus should be on educating youngsters about sex, awareness about infections transmitted sexually, possible complications due to sexually transmitted diseases, and their symptoms, and dealing with the shame regarding obtaining treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.

Keywords: Youth, sexually transmitted diseases, awareness

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Introduction

Sexually transmitted diseases are infections that are transferred by sexual intercourse. They are grouped into curable and noncurable sexually transmitted diseases. Curable sexually transmitted diseases include Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Syphilis, and Trichomonas. On the other hand, HIV, genital herpes, HSV, and HPV are incurable sexually transmitted diseases. Treatment of HIV and HSF causes the virus to repress but is not remediable [1]. If sexually transmitted diseases are not treated on time, it can cause many problems like impotency, miscarriage, and pregnancy-related complications [2-3]. Youngsters' awareness and potential complications of sexually transmitted diseases is important to making preventive and treatment procedures [4]. Youngsters for their higher studies go away from their family, stays as paying guest or hostellers. During this period of time, they interact with many people with different social backgrounds. Possibility of sex without protection, sexual intercourse with multiple partners is very common in young people which can lead to sexually transmitted disease in them.

However, sometimes infection cannot be transmitted sexually, for example through Mother-Child transmission during pregnancy, blood transfusion, or shared needles. The transmission of infection between sexual mates can be through different ways of intercourse oral, anal, or vaginal [5]. The majority of the new sexually transmitted diseases in the USA are reported to be in the age group of 16-23 years as per CDC [6]. One-fourth of women who are infected with HIV are aged between 16-24 years universally. Every year new cases are reported despite of conducting educational programs and the availability of hospitals. In the USA and worldwide Chlamydia trachomatis and Neisseria gonorrhoeae are two of the frequently seen sexually transmitted diseases [7]. Untreated gonococcal urethritis may lead to inflammatory urethral

stricture. This may cause urine retention and possibly renal failure if is not treated on time. When the infection is asymptomatic proper tests are important to recognize infection and make sure the timely treatment.

In both developed and developing countries, sexually transmitted diseases affect youngsters. To minimize the risk of sexually transmitted disease and their incidence, it is important to get sufficient comprehension of the signs, means of transmission, and methods of prevention [8]. Many previous studies have made clear the relation between the increase in sexually transmitted diseases and widespread urbanization and people movement causing an increase in several sexually transmitted diseases in big cities. Sexually transmitted diseases have also validated in remarkable effect on death rates in underdeveloped countries [9]. Sexually transmitted disease leads to serious results in the health of the infected people, and it can also cause occurrence of many peripheral diseases and problems like cervical cancer, infertility, prone to acquiring HIV. Youngsters do not have the necessary information and sources to circumvent sexually transmitted diseases.

Indian government evolved the Adolescent Education Program, in alliance with NACO and UNICEF [5] to aware higher and secondary school-going children about sexually transmitted diseases. In 2006 [3], a facility-based setup was done, and counselors were appointed under the RCH program in which people were educated about reproductive health in Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health. The word sex education sometimes misinterpreted that is teaching about sexual intercourse. In India ethical and communal elements and misunderstandings about sex education in one of the main hurdles in educating people about sex [5]. The current study is carried out to evaluate the knowledge and awareness of sexually transmitted diseases

mainly among youngsters who are already infected and visiting Sexually transmitted disease clinics in India. This leads to recognizing the reason behind less knowledge about STDs and reproductive health which can be dealt with in the coming sex education program.

Methods

Study design

This was a cross-sectional study including 50 patients in the age group of 19-25 carried out at PRM Medical College & Hospital, a tertiary care centre of Eastern India, it was a question-based study. Patient identity was not disclosed in the current study.

Data Collection

Survey forms were given to the patients which were filled confidentially and

without revealing the identity of the patients. The questions were age, sex, literacy, awareness of sexually transmitted diseases, condoms, and belief in sex education. STD counselors helped patients who could not read or understand the survey form. Patients who were not comfortable answering our questions were excluded from the study.

Statistical analysis

SPSS Version 28 statistical software was used for analysis. The data collected was examined for its totality, followed by coding and moving into excel.

Results

A total of 50 patients were included in the research. The number of male patients were 35 and female were 15.

Table 1: Data of the patients according to the questionnaire

Questionnaire	Number of patients
<i>Family type</i>	
Joint family	24
Nuclear family	14
Incomplete family	12
<i>Previous sexual encounters</i>	44
<i>Marital status</i>	16
<i>Sexual preferences</i>	
Heterosexual	46
Homosexual	1
Bisexual	3
<i>Using temporary contraceptive methods like condoms</i>	34

According to Table 1, 24 patients belonged to joint family, 14 belonged to nuclear family and 12 patients had incomplete family. 44 patients had previous sexual encounters, and 16 patients were married. 46 patients were heterosexual, 1 was homosexual and 3 were bisexual. 34 patients are using condoms although 46 were aware of it.

Table 2: Awareness of many STDs among the study population

<i>Sexually transmitted diseases</i>	<i>Number of patients</i>
HIV	44
Syphilis	6
Herpes	2
Gonorrhoea	6
Chlamydia	None
Trichomonas	None
Genital warts	2

As shown in Table 2, the awareness of HIV among the patients is the highest. 44 patients had the knowledge of HIV. 6 patients were aware of syphilis, herpes was known among 2 patients, and 2 patients knew genital warts. None of the patients knew about trichomonas and genital warts.

Table 3: Mode of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases

<i>Mode of transmission of STDs</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
Unprotected sex	42
Blood transfusion	34
Sharing needles	28
Mother to child	23
Sharing clothes/other things	16
Mosquito bite	10
Sharing food	5

According to Table 3, the majority of the patients (42) infected with STDs are because of unprotected sex, 34 got sexually transmitted diseases through blood transfusion, 28 got infected by sharing needles, 23 were transmitted through mother to child, 16 got infected due to sharing things or clothes, 10 patients were infected through mosquito bites and 5 by sharing food.

Discussion

Sexually transmitted infections lead to unusual risks about treatment and an increase in infection because of social shame and low awareness about the infection. The approximation of sexually transmitted disease load is related to the level to which go to the hospital, the number of cases diagnosed, and the number of reports [6]. The median age of sexually transmitted diseases is reduced due to multiple partners or the effect of alcohol in younger age groups at their first physical intercourse experience. Youngsters who are mainly at threat are unlikely to proceed to hospitals because of the prolonged time of observation and some STIs do not show any symptoms, probable problems, not aware of STD symptoms, and other elements.

The prevention of Sexually transmitted diseases can be attained by awareness and conveying knowledge about sexual health, proper and compatible usage of condoms, circumventing intercourse with multiple partners, and testing for syphilis for

pregnant women [10]. Awareness of Sexually transmitted diseases among school-going children, rural and urban regions of India, and college-going students will help in reducing in number of infections. In the current study the majority of the patients knew about HIV, other than HIV very few of them knew about other sexually transmitted diseases. Some of them knew about syphilis, gonorrhoea, herpes, and genital warts but no one was aware of chlamydia and trichomonas. Studies conducted by Florence et al [11], Subbarao NT et al [12], and Yadav et al [13] had similar results. The main source of awareness was from school and then the internet according to the current study. This evaluation is correlated to a study conducted by Aliyu AA et al [14] where the main source of awareness among youngsters in Northwestern Nigeria is teachers and social media. Similarly, a study carried out by Swensson et al [15] in Thailand had similar findings. Awareness about signs of sexually transmitted diseases is very low, this corresponds with the study conducted by Lal et al [16]. Except for HIV, knowledge of other sexually transmitted diseases is very less regardless of educational background.

Even though few patients know Sexually transmitted infection apart from HIV they still do not know the potential complication, symptoms, and risk related to unsafe sexual intercourse and sexual intercourse with

multiple partners. These factors need to be addressed in future educational programs.

The majority of the cases thought sex education should be undertaken in schools to reduce the chances of sexually transmitted diseases. Most of them think that it will decrease sexual intercourse before marriage. It will lead to awareness about sexually transmitted diseases and their prevention. The adult male has a more positive mindset than adult females regarding sex education [17].

Conclusion

In the present study, it was evaluated that regardless of educational qualification a person's awareness about sexually transmitted diseases apart from HIV is very low. Teachers and social media play a vital role in providing sex education. Even though the mindset regarding sex education has been modified, availability and completeness should be addressed to achieve a justifiable amount of knowledge. STDs are considered a stigma that prevents people from getting treatment from health care centers which makes handling difficult. Thus, there is a need to solve the stigma related to sexually transmitted diseases which stops them from going to hospitals. In youngsters' sexual intercourse is new to them and they are not aware of the complications caused by sexually transmitted diseases. Education to school-going children about sexual intercourse will help in spreading awareness and knowledge about sexually transmitted infections.

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