

## ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

### KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, BELIEF AND PRACTICE (K.A.B.P) STUDY ON AIDS AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

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A cross-sectional survey was done among students of four senior secondary schools including two boys and two girls schools of rural Delhi to know the knowledge, attitude, belief and practices regarding AIDS. A large majority (83.0%) of students though had heard about AIDS, yet majority of them did not know the possible methods for prevention of AIDS. There were only 27.1% girls who knew about regular condom usage. Half of them had permissible attitude for pre-marital sex, while sexual activity was observed in one-fourth students. Students were less reluctant to discuss about AIDS than sex, and teachers were preferred as compared to parents in this regard. School is an ideal setting to educate adolescents regarding HIV/AIDS transmission and safer sex behaviour.

**Key words :** Knowledge, Attitude, Belief, Practice, AIDS, Senior secondary students

#### Introduction

The pandemic of AIDS threatens the very fabric of our society. It affects people in most productive stage of life. It is estimated that there are more than half a million persons infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in India. About half of HIV infected persons are under 25 years of age,<sup>1</sup> and one-fifth of all people with AIDS are in their twenties.<sup>2</sup>

Prevention is the key to contain AIDS pandemic. Thus there is an urgent need to carry out K.A.B.P. studies on AIDS among adolescents to plan appropriate interventions to stop further spread of HIV transmission.

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#### Materials and Methods

All four Senior Secondary (S.S) Schools viz. S.S. School, boys and S.S. School girls of Municipal Corporation of Delhi Central School and Composite Model School of Najafgarh block which is one of the Rural Zones of Delhi, were included in the study. Permission was obtained from respective principals after explaining the objective of the study.

Close ended questionnaire was administered to students in their class rooms and confidentiality was maintained. Efforts were made to get individual and correct information from students. In this regard, the help of class teachers was also sought. The survey was conducted in July and August 1992.

#### Results

The analysis consisted of 700 question-

naires duly filled in out of 772 students on role, including 368 boys and 332 girls.

A large majority (83.0%) of students were aware about AIDS. Boys and girls had almost equal awareness about AIDS, i.e. 81.8% and 84.3% respectively. The important sources for most of the information about AIDS were newspaper/magazine (43.9%), television (23%) and friends (14.1.2%). Half (49.7%) of the students believed that AIDS is an infectious disease while 40.1% thought that it can not be cured.

**Table I : Students Knowledge about different modes of AIDS transmission**

	Blood	Sex	Needle/Syringes	I.V.D.U.
Boys N=368	199 (54.1)	243 (66.0)	216 (58.7)	140 (30.0)
Girls N=332	170 (51.2)	220 (69.2)	229 (71.9)	181 (54.5)
Total N=700	369 (52.7)	463 (66.9)	455 (65.0)	321 (45.8)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

**Table II: Students knowledge about prevention of AIDS transmission**

	Regular condom usage	Avoid sex outside marriage	Safe blood transfusion	Use of sterile syringes/needles
Boys N=368	191 (51.9)	188 (51.1)	187 (50.8)	115 (31.2)
Girls N=332	90 (27.1)	113 (34.0)	148 (44.5)	132 (39.7)
Total N= 700	281 (40.1)	301 (43.0)	335 (47.8)	247 (35.3)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

Two-third of students knew about sexual and injectable modes of AIDS transmission (Table 1). Almost half were aware about blood transfusion route and 45.8% knew about intravenous drug users (I.V.D.U.) transmission. Girls were found to be better informed about injectable mode of transmission than boys. About sexual transmission, boys believed homosexual contact to be more common than heterosexual i.e. 51.3% and 44.0% respectively. Conversely, girls thought heterosexual route as more likely route of sexual transmission than homosexual i.e. 52.1% and 44.2% respectively.

For AIDS transmission, certain misconceptions viz. donating blood (38.9%), kissing (34.3%), sharing toilet with AIDS patient (26.1%) and shaking hands (14.15) were also observed to be present among students.

Majority of students did not know possible methods for prevention of AIDS transmission (Table II). The level of awareness about use of safe blood products, avoiding sex outside marriage, regular condom usage and use of sterile syringes and needles was between 35.3% - 47.8% in descending order. Girls were most ignorant about regular condom usage, only 27.1% knew about it. Boys were well informed about all methods of prevention as compared to girls except use of sterile syringes and needles.

A little less than half (43.0%) of students were willing to discuss freely and frankly about AIDS with teacher, and girls were found to be more open as compared to boys i.e. 49.0% and 37.5% respectively. There were only one-fourth students who agreed to talk freely and frankly about AIDS with parents, and girls were much more forthcoming than boys i.e. 34.9% and 14.7% respectively. However, majority (57.4%) of stu-

dents had discussed AIDS with friends and on the contrary, boys were more open with friends as compared to girls i.e. 64.7% and 56.3%.

Students were generally reluctant to talk about sex with teacher and parents both. This attitude, however, was more pronounced for parents than teachers, i.e. 11.4% and 23.7% respectively. Comparatively, they had discussed sex more often (40.7%) with friends though girls were less open than boys i.e. 30.4% and 56.3% respectively.

Almost half (46.7%) of students had permissible attitude for pre-marital sex (Table III), and majority of these believed it is for boys and

**Table III : Permissible attitude of students for pre-marital sex.**

	For male only	For male only only	For both	Total
Boys N=368	42 (11.4)	27 (7.3)	124 (33.7)	193 (52.4)
Girls N=332	43 (13.0)	11 (3.3)	80 (24.0)	134 (40.3)
Total N=700	85 (12.1)	38 (5.4)	204 (29.2)	327 (46.7)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

**Table IV : Sexual experience of students**

	Yes	No response	No
Boys N=368	86 (22.3)	21 (5.7)	261 (71.0)
Girls N=332	50 (15.0)	32 (9.6)	250 (75.4)
Total N=700	136 (19.4)	53 (7.5)	511 (73.1)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

girls both. This attitude was found to be higher among boys than girls, i.e. 52.4% and 40.3% respectively.

However, 40.3% girls believing that pre-marital sex is permissible at this age and 24.0% feeling that it is for boys and girls both is a significant observation, in a conservative society like ours.

Extra-marital sex was thought to be acceptable by 18.7% students while another 24.1% believed that it could be acceptable under special circumstances (marital discord). This indulgent attitude was twice as common in boys as compared to girls i.e. 56.29% and 28.5% respectively. Acceptability under special circumstances was also found to be higher among boys than girls.

One in four students at this age admitted having sexual experience or did not say no to it (Table IV). There were 23.3% boys who had sexual experience and 5.7% did not deny it. Interestingly 15.0% girls also admitted while 9.6% did not comment.

Felt-need to know more about AIDS was expressed by two third (67.4%) of students and girls were more (77.7%) keen than boys (58.1%). Preferred sources were - television (31.4%) and magazine (14.8%). Television was most preferred medium by boys and girls both. Girls chose schools as second preference while boys wanted printed material.

## Discussion

Adolescents are more likely to indulge in at risk behaviour than others. However, they are often less likely to be aware about the risk of HIV transmission. In the present study though students had heard about AIDS yet almost half of

them did not know common modes of transmission. Even awareness about AIDS amongst senior secondary students was found to be less when compared with school children of Zimbabwe and Ireland.<sup>4,5</sup>

The knowledge about AIDS transmission by two common modes viz. sexual contact and intravenous route was also less as compared to school children of Kenya and San Francisco, where almost all of them knew about these modes of transmission.<sup>6,7</sup> However, the level of understanding about transmission by blood and its products was almost equal.<sup>5</sup> Misconceptions about AIDS transmission by casual contact and while donating blood were common.

Majority of students did not know various methods of AIDS prevention. They were unaware about regular condom usage and use of sterile syringes and needles while most of the students in other studies, knew about risk-behaviour and also that AIDS is not transmitted by casual contact.<sup>5,7</sup>

Pre-marital sex was thought as permissible by almost half of students and majority of these believed it for boys and girls both. This is in conformity with students of Kenya.<sup>8</sup> Sexual activity was observed in one-fourth students which is surprisingly almost equal to school children, in Columbia,<sup>9</sup> on paradoxically it is lower than observed in school children in San Francisco and Kenya.<sup>7,8</sup>

A large majority of students wanted to obtain further information on AIDS and preferred mass-media and school. Role of mass-media particularly television can not be over-emphasised in developing countries where level of literacy is low and school drop outs are common. However, messages should not be too many,

and should be clear and finely tuned. Adolescents generally find it difficult to discuss sex related matters at home. Parents themselves are also not well informed. Therefore, school becomes an ideal setting to educate and reinforce behavioural changes in large number of students in favourable environment.<sup>3,10</sup>

In this direction, teachers training, development of teaching and training materials on AIDS education and involvement of students by role play technique will make adolescent not only more knowledgeable but also help in developing tolerant attitude and in practising safe sex behaviour.

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