

## Measuring knowledge about HIV among youth: A survey for Vadodara district

Sir,

In India, the age group 15–24 years comprises almost 25% of the country's population; however, they account for 31% of the AIDS burden.<sup>[1]</sup> Adolescents and youth are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. One of the reasons for their vulnerability to STDs and HIV is the lack of sex education, including education on STD prevention.<sup>[2]</sup> With UNICEF support, Government of Gujarat had decided to initiate education packages for awareness generation and intervention packages through Voluntary and Government Organizations for prevention of HIV/AIDS. So the present study was undertaken for Vadodara district of Gujarat to assess the knowledge and awareness among young men and women about HIV and its transmission in Vadodara district (rural) to provide the direction to the intervention package. The study also compared their knowledge about HIV with reference to gender difference.

This was a cross-sectional study conducted in a rural area. Thirty clusters were selected by a two-stage cluster sampling technique. 363 young men and 1144 young women in the age group of 15–24 years of age were selected after taking their consent. The proforma was pre-designed and pre-tested. The study was conducted from March 2008 to May 2008. The data

were entered using Epi Info (version 6.04d) software, checked for consistency, cleaned as necessary and then analyzed.

When asked whether they had heard about HIV, 60% of young men said that they had heard about HIV while only 23% of women admitted of having heard about HIV. The difference was statistically significant between young men and women. These men and women, who mentioned that they have heard of HIV, were further questioned regarding the source of information for HIV. The major source of information was television (72.4%) followed by radio (34.2%), newspaper (26.7%), friends/relatives (23.0%), teachers (18.0%), health worker (13.0%), and doctor (10%). Those who had heard about HIV were further questioned about the mode of HIV transmission. They mentioned sexual act as the most common mode of transmission followed by needle and blood transfusion as depicted in Table 1. However hug, kiss, utensils, mosquito bites, and clothes also appeared as a mode of HIV transmission in smaller proportions. About 18.4% of young men and women did not know how it is transmitted, more women than men. When inquired about whether HIV infection can be prevented, 67% of the youth (66.2% young men and 67.7% young women) opined that it could be prevented. The difference was

**Table 1: Mode of transmission as known to rural youth of Vadodara**

Transmission	Male N=219		Female N=260		Total N=479	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percents	Number	Percents
Sexual act	175	79.9	194	74.6	369	77.0
Needle	78	35.6	92	35.4	170	35.5
Blood transfusion	59	26.9	48	18.5	107	22.3
Mother to child	29	13.2	46	17.7	75	15.7
Blood donor	29	13.2	22	8.5	51	10.6
Blades	25	11.4	20	7.7	45	9.4
Incorrect modes (clothes, utensils, plate, kiss, hug, hands, urine / stool, HIV patient contact, mosquito bite)	54	24.6	48	18.4	102	21.2
Don't Know	38	17.4	50	19.2	88	18.4

\*(multiple answers)

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not statistically significant between the two groups. Only 54% knew that HIV can be present in apparently healthy looking persons.

More men than women claimed to know about HIV. Whether women really did not know or preferred to mention that they did not know is difficult to differentiate. One study conducted among urban school going youth by Kotecha *et al.*<sup>[3]</sup> found that 72% of the men and only 47% of the women had heard about HIV, whereas in this study conducted among rural youth the percentages were comparatively lower. This calls for immediate intervention to make them aware about this fast growing infection to enable them to take protective steps.

Television, radio, and newspapers (mass media) were the most common sources of information for HIV and surprisingly teachers, doctors, and health workers ranked low. More young men than women preferred to obtain information from their peers. School was not the common source even though syllabus covers all this information which may be due to the fact that not all young women and men attend schools and also because school teachers are shy in providing this information. This is similar to the observation made among adolescents by Kotecha *et al.*<sup>[4]</sup> and Haldar *et al.*<sup>[5]</sup> in urban areas, and Singh *et al.*<sup>[6]</sup> in rural areas. It highlights the role of mass media in spreading messages and also points out inhibitions among teachers in talking about HIV to their students.

When inquired about HIV prevention, more men than women thought that HIV can be prevented. It is noteworthy however that a large proportion (25%) did not know that HIV can be prevented. Having single partner, using condoms, avoiding commercial sex workers, and blood checkups were the common methods mentioned both by men and women for HIV prevention (multiple answers were allowed). It was interesting to note that the most common answer among youth was to have a single marital partner. The incorrect mode of transmission mentioned even in smaller proportions calls for the need for HIV

education. Creating awareness about HIV/ AIDS still remains a challenging task especially in removing the misconceptions that are prevalent.

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