

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Awareness of Sexually Transmitted Diseases [STDs] in College Students

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## Abstract

**Background:** Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) remain an important cause of morbidity and mortality among women in the child-bearing age. In order to institute appropriate preventive measures there is need to establish the profile of knowledge of the predisposing factors and causation of STDs, attitude to sexual practice and sexual patterns among the susceptible young people, such as university students. Therefore this study was planned to study the level of awareness of college students about the sexually transmitted diseases. **Materials and methods:** The study was carried out on 500 students of nearby colleges including of 250 male and 250 female students. Specially prepared questionnaires were administered to these participants and their responses were recorded. **Results:** All the 500 student participants' scores were recorded and analyzed in various categories like awareness about various STDs, Awareness of symptoms of STDs, awareness of features suggestive of STDs, Awareness of factors responsible for the predisposition of STDs, awareness sexual practices and awareness about the prevention of STDs. Overall, female students had better levels of awareness as compared to male students, about prevention of STDs **Conclusion:** This study focuses on various aspects awareness of STD in the college students. Education about STDs should be given early on in schools to encourage premarital screenings and hence help reduce the risk of the possible expansion of infection.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Sexually Transmitted Diseases STD

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## Introduction

The stage of life during which individuals reach sexual maturity is known as adolescence. It is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Although the change is biological, the duration and nature of adolescence are primarily a social construct and thus vary greatly from culture to culture.<sup>1</sup> Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) have been conventionally recognized as a major public and social health problem for a number of year's now.<sup>2</sup> Largely because of the HIV epidemic, interest in STDs has increased over the past two decades.<sup>3</sup> It is the varying socio-cultural and economic contexts in developing countries which largely influence the epidemiology of STDs and help to highlight the important public health priorities.<sup>2</sup> STDs are caused by more than

30 different bacteria, viruses and parasites and spread predominantly by sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex, however, organisms causing STDs can also be spread through non-sexual means such as blood products and tissue transfer. Many STDs—including Chlamydia, gonorrhoea, hepatitis B, HIV can be vertically transmitted from mother to child. An infected person can be asymptomatic; therefore, the term "sexually transmitted infection" is a broader term than "sexually transmitted disease" (STD). Common symptoms of STDs include vaginal discharge, urethral discharge in men, genital ulcers, and abdominal pain.<sup>2</sup> Despite the commonality of STDs, they are one of the most under recognized health problems worldwide. Many people with STDs are asymptomatic and remain undiagnosed. In addition, those who are

diagnosed are frequently not reported and counted.<sup>3</sup>This study was done to know the awareness of the college students about the sexually transmitted diseases.

## Materials and Methods

This particular cross-sectional study was carried out among the college students of the age group of 18 to 25 years over a period of 6 to 8 months. A specially prepared questionnaire addressing the socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge of the various diseases, their features, transmission and complications of sexually transmitted diseases, methods of prevention are administered to the participants. Total of 500 participants were included in this study. Out of these, 250 were males and 250 were female participants. The participants were of nearby various junior and senior colleges except medical colleges. The questionnaires were distributed on personal interview with the students on class-room basis. A time of half an hour was given to the students and after that the answered sheets were collected and scores were calculated. Each correct answer was given as score 1, while incorrect answer or not-answered

question were given a score of zero. Ethical permission of study was obtained and all students participated willingly in the study. Statistical analysis was done with the help of IBM SPSS statistics version 20 using student's t test.

## Results

All the 500 student participants' scores were recorded and analyzed in various categories like awareness about various STDs, Awareness of symptoms of STDs, awareness of features suggestive of STDs, Awareness of factors responsible for the predisposition of STDs, awareness sexual practices and awareness about the prevention of STDs. All the data obtained were compared between males and females.

The results of the study were shown in table no.1. In overall, female student had more awareness as compared to male students, except in certain areas of knowledge like awareness about prevention of STDs. The difference in awareness between males and female students was found statistically significant in case of awareness of symptoms suggestive of STDs. (Student's t test,  $p < 0.05$ )

**Table 1:** Table showing the responses of the college students regarding various aspects of the STDs. Comparison was done between male and female participants using student's t test.

Questionnaires	Male participants score (N=250) Mean ± SD	Female participants score (N=250) Mean ± SD	T value	P value
Awareness of STDs (10 questions)	6.40 ± 0.70	6.30 ± 1.25	0.2206	$p > 0.05^*$
Awareness of symptoms (05 questions)	2.00 ± 0.67	2.90 ± 0.88	2.5861	$P < 0.05^{**}$
Awareness of features suggestive of STDs (05 questions)	2.42 ± 0.97	2.36 ± 0.84	0.00	$p > 0.05^*$
Awareness of factors responsible for the predisposition of STDs (05 questions)	2.20 ± 0.63	2.90 ± 0.88	2.0494	$p > 0.05^*$
Awareness sexual practices (03 questions)	1.40 ± 0.52	1.60 ± 0.52	0.8660	$p > 0.05^*$
Awareness about the prevention of STDs (05 questions)	3.20 ± 1.03	2.40 ± 0.70	2.0284	$p > 0.05^*$

## Discussion

World Health Organization (WHO) identifies the age range 10-19 years as the period of adolescence, while the term "youth" denotes the age group 15-24.<sup>4</sup> Sexually transmitted diseases

are illnesses that have a significant probability of transmission from infected person to normal persons through sexual behavior, including vaginal intercourse, oral sex, and anal sex (1). STDs are found among people between 15 and 24 years; up to 60% of the new infections and

half of all sero-positive people globally are in this age group.<sup>5,6</sup> In Indian society, it is seen that STIs are widely associated with social stigma, embarrassment and denial. Sexuality and associated health risks are still a major taboo.<sup>7</sup> To date, prevention and control of STDs, especially among the youth, is a low priority for most countries. Lack of awareness of the problem of STDs and their complications, competition for resources to control other important health problems and the reluctance of public health policy makers to deal with diseases associated with sexual behavior have all played a role in this neglect.<sup>1</sup> Young people are particularly vulnerable to STDs and consequent health problems because<sup>8</sup>:

In this study, the focus was on adolescent knowledge about five to six main STDs (genital herpes, human papilloma virus, syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia and HIV/AIDS). The majorities of the participants were familiar with HIV, syphilis and gonorrhoea as STDs and had a fair amount of information about their curability. However, knowledge about genital herpes curability was poor despite their knowledge of it being an STD. The educational materials provided during the survey helped participants understand that HPV and Chlamydia were also STDs.<sup>1</sup> Heterosexual intercourse is the principal mode of transmission of HIV infection in India, accounting for nearly 75% of all HIV infections.<sup>1</sup> Sexually active youth have been identified as a group at high risk of HIV infection." There is substantial evidence that STDs enhance the transmission and acquisition of HIV infection, and that control of STDs is helpful in preventing HIV/AIDS.<sup>9</sup> The spread of HIV in any community is in part determined by the knowledge of and attitudes towards sexuality of its members, and by their actual sexual practices. Before formulating public health policies for the prevention of HIV, it is critical to obtain information about the prevalent knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) regarding HIV/AIDS, STDs and sexuality in the target community. Several studies on KAP regarding HIV/AIDS have been reported from different parts of India.<sup>9-10</sup>

More than 30 pathogens known to be transmitted through sexual contact have been linked to the greatest incidence of illness, of

these eight infections, four are currently curable: syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia and trichomoniasis. The other four are viral infections and known to be incurable, however can be mitigated or modulated through treatment: hepatitis B, herpes, HIV, and HPV.<sup>1</sup> It is also very Important to Focus more On adolescent girl's awareness regarding these issues as women have higher incidence of STDs than men because of their greater susceptibility.<sup>11-12</sup> Females also bear much more severe morbidity of STDs than males, get severe consequences if not treated and even transmit the STDs to offspring during pregnancy and child birth causing various complications. Added upon this is the social stigma attached to STD accounting for non-detection of cases, not disclosing the source of contact and dropping out before treatment.<sup>13</sup>

High-risk sexual behavior among adolescents is a major concern to parents, educational professionals, and health authorities throughout the world. Previous studies have demonstrated that gender and social class are strong determinants of high-risk sexual behavior.<sup>14</sup> When enquired about prevention of STDs, it was found that 38% patients knew that STDs can be prevented by being faithful. In the present study, it was also found that 31% patients knew that STDs can be prevented by condom. The reason for less knowledge in present study may be that the study was conducted among women while the other was among men. More respondents (66.2% college girls) were aware that condoms prevent STDs.<sup>13</sup> Suggested future research should be a correlation study comparing age, ethnicity, sexual preference and with degree of sexually risky behavior.<sup>11</sup>

STDs are preventable and many of them are curable. As the adage goes, prevention is better than cure. WHO suggests that improving awareness and knowledge of STDs should be a part of all sexual health education and services. The purpose of knowledge is action. However, majority females don't have access to information and education on STDs, nor do they have access to preventive and treatment services. All these factors add up to make females more susceptible to sexually transmitted infections, their complications and finally reinfections.<sup>11</sup>

This study achieved to draw an insight of STDs knowledge in college students. The overall knowledge of the students was found to be deficient on some aspects of STD. There were different influential factors which helped enhance this knowledge. This was a key study which could help health providers identify the role of media in imparting sexual education amongst the youth of this country and could later be targeted to improve the health care practices in our country.

## Conclusion

STDs are common and preventable causes of morbidity and serious complications; thus primary prevention of STDs needs to be given high priority. Education about STDs should be given early on in schools to encourage premarital screenings and hence help reduce the risk of the possible expansion of infection. Health educators should adopt this strategy. Integrated approach is strongly suggested for creating knowledge and awareness to control the spread of STDs (including HIV and AIDS) among young people.

**Conflict of Interest:** None declared

**Source of Support:** Nil

**Ethical Permission:** Obtained

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