

AWARENESS ON HIV/AIDS AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN A SOUTH INDIAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

A total of 120 women in the sexually and economically productive age group of 15-45 years, belonging to Meppedu, a rural place, 45 Km away from Chennai city were interviewed by means of structured interview schedule, just to find out the basic knowledge of these women about HIV/AIDS. Only 70.00 per cent of them knew it is the name of a disease, and 26.00 per cent of them were aware of the organism which is causing this disease. Only 41.00 per cent of the women were aware of the mode of transmission of AIDS, and 34.00 per cent were aware of the medium of HIV transmission. However, 76.00 per cent of the women had the knowledge of who are the high risk for HIV/AIDS. 48.00 per cent of the women were aware of the preventive measures for HIV infection. On the whole, it was observed in this study that the awareness on HIV/AIDS among the rural women was not high.

KEY WORDS

HIV/AIDS Awareness Rural Women

INTRODUCTION

AIDS has become the most dreaded phenomenon in the health scenario of many countries today including India. In India, seven adults in 1000 are infected with AIDS, 3.7 million people are living with HIV/AIDS in beginning of the millennium-more than in any other country in the world except South Africa.⁽¹⁾ It is believed that every Indian will have at least one member of this extended family affected with AIDS. The trend of HIV infection will have a profound impact on future rates of infant, child and maternal mortality life expectancy and economic growth⁽¹⁾.

As far as women are concerned, among the newly infected HIV cases, half are women. A recent report estimates that

in India, almost 30.00 per cent HIV infection occurs in those women who have sexual intercourse with a single male partner⁽²⁾. According to the World Bank report, in developing countries among women aged 15-44 years, 15.00 per cent of the healthy days are lost due to STDs including HIV⁽³⁾. But as women are the traditional caregivers, even uninfected women are affected by HIV when it enters a family⁽⁴⁾. Since there is no suitable curative medicine or vaccine against it till now, creating awareness through health education is the only available means to control its spread. Hence, an attempt was made to find out the knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS among the women folk in a rural community.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This study was carried out in a village Meppedu which is 45 Km away from Chennai city. In Meppedu village women who were in the most economically and sexually productive age group of 15-45, were selected by purposive sampling and were interviewed by using a structured interview schedule. Each and every respondent explained about the purpose of this exercise and data collection was started after obtaining the informed consent. The interview schedule had questions regarding the basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS. 120 women were interviewed and the data collected was analysed. The total data was collected for a period of two months.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic factors

Age :

61 women belonged to the age group 15-30 years and the rest 59 women belonged to the age group of 31-45 years.

Education :

In this study sample of 120 women, 62 were illiterates, 32 have studied from 1st standard to VIIIth standard. 25 women have studied from IXth standard to plus 2. There was only one graduate in this group.

Occupation :

As far as the occupation is concerned, 117 women were not employed, 2 were doing the tailoring job and one was working as a clerk.

No.	Opinions	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	It is the name of an article	8	7
2.	It is the name of a place	5	4
3.	it is the name of a disease	84	70
Total		120	100

Among the 120 women respondents only, 70.00 per cent of them were able to tell that it is the name of a disease, when the question "What is AIDS" was posed to them. 11.00 per cent of them were not able to give the correct answer and the remaining 19.00 per cent did not know "what is AIDS".

When the question, whether AIDS is a hereditary disease, was asked to those 120 women respondents, only 75(62.00 per cent) of them said that it is not hereditary disease, whereas 21(18.00per cent) women said that it is a hereditary disease. 24(20.00 per cent) of them did not know what is AIDS at all.

Table 2 : CAUSES FOR AIDS

Sl. No.	Cause for AIDS	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Mosquitoes	9	8
2.	Some insect	13	11
3.	HIV virus	31	26
4.	Don't know	67	55
Total		120	100

When it was attempted to find out what could be the causative organism for HIV according to their perception, 67 women that is 55.00 per cent of them said that they were not able to perceive anything regarding this. Nine women said that AIDS is caused by mosquitoes and only 26 per cent of the respondents reported that AIDS is caused by HIV virus.

Table 3 Mode of HIV/AIDS Transmission

Sl. No	Method of Infection	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	By touching	3	3
2.	By wearing the same clothes of an infected person	3	3
3.	By shaking hands	5	4
4.	By playing together	6	5
5.	By using the same vessels	7	5
6.	By using the same toilet	2	2
7.	By blood transfusion	22	18
8.	Mother to child	0	0
9.	By sexual intercourse	27	23
10.	By staying together	22	18
11.	By sharing the needles of an infected person	0	0
12.	Don't know	23	19
Total		120	100

Table 4 : Medium of HIV Transmission

Sl. No.	Various Medium	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Through sputum	4	3
2.	Through blood	24	20
3.	Through water	5	4
4.	Through urine	9	8
5.	Through air	13	11
6.	Through faecal matter	9	8
7.	Through vaginal secretions	17	14
8.	Through semen	0	0
9.	Don't Know	39	32
Total		120	100

When the respondents were asked what could be the method of HIV infection to our body, only 27 women said that it could be by sexual intercourse and 22 said that it could be by blood transfusion. 23 women could not give any answer for this above question and the rest of them gave various methods like, "by touching, by shaking hands, by using the same clothes and vessels. by playing together and by using the same toilet.

Only 24 women respondents have said that blood is the medium of HIV transmission and another 17 have said that vaginal secretions are the medium of HIV transmission. 39 women did not give the answer and the rest of the 40 women gave wrong answers like water, sputum. air, urine, faecal matter etc. Not even a single women said that HIV could be transmitted through semen.

Table 5 : The High Risk Groups

Sl. No.	Risk Groups	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Commercial sex worker	55	46
2.	Truck drivers	10	8
3.	Homosexuals	14	12
4.	Travelling people	12	10
5.	Don't know	29	24
Total		120	100

Among the 120 women respondents, 55 women told that Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) are the high-risk groups who could get the HIV infection. Ten women told that truck drivers are the high-risk groups, whereas 14 women told homosexuals are the high-risk groups.

Table 6 : Preventive Measures for HIV Infection

Sl. No.	Preventive Measure	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Taking only boiled water	5	4
2.	Using HIV tested blood for blood transfusion	28	23
3.	Using Condoms	30	25
4.	Don't's Know	57	48
Total		120	100

When it was tried to know from the study population regarding the preventive measures for HIV transmission, only 30 told that by using condoms HIV infection could be prevented. 23.00 per cent stated that using HIV tested blood for blood transfusion would be preventive measure. 57 respondents were not able to give any answer for this question.

DISCUSSION

In this present study HIV/AIDS knowledge was not high among the rural women, only 70.00 per cent of them know that it is a disease. In the report on Realities of Sexual Behaviour in Tamil Nadu - 1998" of the AIDS Prevention and Control Project of the Voluntary Health Services, HIV/AIDS knowledge is almost total among the women in prostitution and Pimps and Brokers. AIDS is fully recognised as an incurable killer disease⁽⁵⁾. Still 15.00 per cent of the women believed that AIDS is a hereditary disease. In this present study, only 23.00 per cent of the rural women have reported that sexual inter course between man and women could be the mode of HIV/AIDS transmission, and another 18.00 per cent of the women stated that blood transfusion could be another mode of HIV

transmission. This is not surprising among the women population with more than 50 per cent of illiterates. Even in the study by Anwar et al, it has been reported that though most of the nursing students have fairly good knowledge about AIDS, they were still confused about the mode of transmission⁽⁶⁾. But in the study on "Awareness of AIDS among Patient visiting Rajendra Hospital, Patiala - A profile of 5000 cases" by Chopra et al, it is shown that people in general are well aware of heterosexual means of transmission of AIDS. 34.00 per cent of the women respondents have reports that blood and vaginal secretion are the medium of HIV transmission and not even a single woman told that semen also is one of the HIV transmission medium. 76.00 per cent of the respondents reported that Commercial Sex Workers, truck drivers, homosexuals and travelling people were the high-risk group people. 24.00 per cent did not know anything about the risk groups.

As far as the preventive measures for HIV infection was considered, 48.00 per cent of the people only knew about the same, as they were the ones who said, using HIV tested blood for blood transfusion and using the condoms were the preventive measures for HIV infection. In the study by Rahate et al⁷, fairly good knowledge about high-risk groups and modes of transmission was present among the junior college students from rural areas. But there are lots of misconception regarding transmission of AIDS⁽⁷⁾.

COMMENTS

This present study revealed that the awareness rate about HIV/AIDS among the rural women was not high. Since more than 50.00 per cent of the sample women were illiterates and they are already out

of school a mass campaign should be started by Non Governmental Organisations and the Government with the help of audio visual aids so that message reaches all the strata of the society. Since none of the studies have showed a 100.00 per cent awareness among the people, it becomes mandatory to start educating the people right from school level. Children while at school are more attentive and receptive and when they come out of school have their ideas clear about HIV/AIDS. Since the year "2001" was declared as the "Year of Women's Empowerment", our Government should have focus send its attention on women's health empowerment, especially towards creating awareness on HIV/AIDS among the women through various communication strategies, by using women's self help groups, enabling them to get the message that " The only way to fight AIDS is to prevent AIDS therefore, campaigns may be launched to create consciousness.

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