Original article:

Knowledge about safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS among school students in a rural area of Jalgaon District of Maharashtra

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ABSTRACT

Background: Reproductive health of school children is a major concern of public health in India. Early marriage and early pregnancy are the major issues in India especially in rural areas. Early motherhood is strongly associated with risk of maternal morbidity and mortality and adds to other reproductive health problems such as sexually transmitted infections like HIV/AIDS. School education has been described as ‘social vaccine’ and it can serve as a powerful preventive tool. The present study was undertaken to assess the knowledge levels of school students in rural area of Maharashtra about safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS.

Methodology: A cross sectional study was conducted at one of the randomly selected schools of Jalgaon District of Maharashtra. A Structured pretested self administered questionnaire consisting of 15 questions in local language was distributed to all 106 students of 8th and 9th class. The marking system for each complete question was assigned. The data was entered in Microsoft Office Excel Sheet and was analysed.

Results: The response rate of students was 100%. Mean score (S.D.) out of 15 = 7.02 (1.46). Only 58(54.71%) students agreed that hospital delivery is safer than home delivery.

Conclusion: The present study revealed inadequacies in the knowledge of safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS amongst school students in Jalgaon District of Maharashtra.

Key words: HIV/AIDS, Knowledge, Safe motherhood, School students

INTRODUCTION

The reproductive health addresses the reproductive processes, functions and systems at all stages of life1. Reproductive health of school children is a major concern of public health in India. Early marriage and early pregnancy are the major issues in India especially in rural areas. Early motherhood is strongly associated with risk of maternal morbidity and mortality and adds to other reproductive health problems such as sexually transmitted infections like HIV/AIDS2.

As per NFHS-3 survey of India, over 45-50% of girls get married below the legal age of marriage and 16-19% of total pregnancies are teenage pregnancies7. Adolescents form substantial risk group for HIV/AIDS due to situations arising out of their curiosity, haphazard knowledge and risk prone behaviour. Fifty percent of all new HIV infections arise in young people (15-24 years) and also the prevalence of HIV in age group 15-19 years is showing unfavourable trends3. School education has been described as ‘social vaccine’ and it can serve as a powerful preventive tool4. Thus schools can provide a unique opportunity for education and discussion of issues related to reproductive health and safe motherhood.

Despite of countrywide education programs, knowledge on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS among school students is found to be low and very few studies have been conducted so far to assess
the knowledge of school students about safe motherhood. The present study was undertaken to assess the knowledge levels of school students in rural area of Maharashtra about safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS.

MATERIAL AND METHODS
This was a cross-sectional study, conducted in one of the randomly selected schools of Jalgaon District of Maharashtra. Out of a total of 1200 students in school, a sample of 106 students from standard eight to nine was included as study participants. Written permission was obtained from school authorities as well as parents of study participants after explaining the purpose of study to them.

A structured pretested self-administered questionnaire consisting of 15 questions in local language was distributed to all 106 students. All questions were close-ended questions. They were allowed 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire under strict supervision. Anonymity of participants was completely maintained.

All questions were based on safe motherhood and basic aspects of HIV/AIDS. The marking system for each complete question was assigned. The data was entered in Microsoft Office Excel Sheet and was analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
In present study, of 106 students, 66 (62.26%) were boys and 40 (37.73%) were girls. All (100%) students were in age bracket of 14-16 years. The response rate of students was 100%.

Knowledge of students about safe motherhood
Even though the present study was not intended to assess in detail knowledge of reproductive health, some basic questions indicate that knowledge of many aspects of reproductive health and sexuality among students was observed to be poor (Table 1). Mean score (S.D.) out of 15 = 7.02 (1.46).

Regarding the signs of puberty, only 48 (45.28%) students could cite the signs of puberty. However in a study of Declare L Mushi, percentage of students who could not state the signs of puberty was less as only 28% of boys and 14.2% of girls could not cite any sign. Only 58 (54.71%) students agreed that hospital delivery is safer than home delivery. However in present study, students showed good knowledge about certain aspects like age of marriage, family planning etc. (Table 1).

Table 1: Knowledge of students about safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS (n=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct response</th>
<th>No. of students with correct response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideally age of marriage of girl should not be less than 18</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>85(80.19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not possible to plan how many children one should have</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>91(85.85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home delivery is better than hospital delivery</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>58 (54.71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is very important for pregnant woman to follow all traditions for a safe delivery</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>47(44.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School children can be infected with HIV</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>74(69.81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. programme for prevention of HIV from pregnant mother to her baby</td>
<td>PPTCT/PMTCT</td>
<td>32(30.18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV can be transmitted from pregnant mother to her baby</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>101(95.28%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowledge of students about HIV/AIDS

In present study, only 5(4.71%) students did not agree that HIV can be transmitted through vertical transmission. Similar knowledge was observed in secondary school students in Jamnagar\(^6\) where out of 358 students, 16(4.4%) did not consider vertical transmission as a mode of HIV transmission. Twenty six (24.52%) students felt that HIV spread cannot be controlled by use of condom. Comparatively better knowledge was revealed among high school students of Kathmandu Valley\(^7\) as 92.6% of students stated that condom use as a safe sex strategy for HIV/AIDS.

Thirty two (30.18%) students felt that school children can not be infected with HIV/AIDS. However, misconceptions about this concept were found to be more in school children of Rural Tanzania\(^5\) where the majority of students thought that HIV cannot infect young people. The key finding of present study was that school students had poor knowledge about safe motherhood as well as HIV/AIDS. Generally, this problem can be linked with the overall weakness of school health and reproductive health education programs. It reiterates the need for comprehensive organized health education programme for school students.

The components of safe motherhood programme like antenatal and postnatal care, birth preparedness, the importance of a skilled attendant during delivery, pregnancy complications, post-abortion care etc. need to be introduced in school education programmes.

**CONCLUSION**

The present study revealed inadequacies in the knowledge of safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS amongst school students in Jalgaon District of Maharashtra. There is strong need to incorporate reproductive health education programme in school curriculum.

**REFERENCES**


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