



## Secondary School Students and HIV/AIDS Awareness

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### Abstract

Awareness programmes are essential for the development of secondary school students. Secondary school students need to participate in a series of awareness and educational programmes apart from their fixed curriculum. This study seeks to assess the HIV/AIDS awareness of secondary school students in Kollam district, Kerala. It is a cross-sectional descriptive study using a mixed research method where 600 secondary school students and 48 key informants participated. The tools used are Indian Adolescent Health Questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule. The data analysis was done through SPSS and Atlas ti. It was found that a fifth of secondary school students never heard of HIV or AIDS. More than half of them were never taught about HIV/AIDS and almost two-thirds never talked about such matters with their parents. Comparatively, more females never heard about HIV/AIDS and never discussed it with their parents. Many secondary students still lack awareness of numerous health issues and pertinent issues like sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, and prevention are not shared on an open platform.

**Keywords:** Awareness; Secondary; School; Students; HIV/AIDS

### Introduction

HIV/AIDS is an epidemic that affects all age groups. There were 1.7 million adolescents were affected by HIV across the globe in 2019. The highest numbers of HIV-positive adolescents are in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Female adolescents are more number of HIV infections [1], and 120,000 children and adolescents live with HIV in India [2].

Adolescence is the age between 10 to 19 years old [3], it is a period of physical, mental, and social transformation. Therefore the period is prone to risky health behaviours and the vulnerability among adolescents may lead to HIV infections and AIDS [4]. Adolescents need awareness of sexuality and a positive sexual attitude, and this knowledge must be established in the early adolescent period [5].

A study conducted among students in India found that more than nine-tenths of them heard about HIV/AIDS and were aware that HIV can spread through body fluids such as blood, sexual contact, and urine [6]. Six-tenth of youth knows about HIV and nine-tenth of them knew the modes of transmission [7]. Little less than three-fourths of adolescents supposed that insecure sexual contact was the main way of transmission [8]. Half of the adolescents had misconceptions regarding the modes of transmission [9].

A review of the literature found that HIV prevalence is more among youth, women, and myths and misconceptions still triumph. Young males are more engaged in premarital sexual activity and condom usage is low [10]. Another study found that secondary school students' source of information about HIV/AIDS was televi-

sion and less from friends and relatives [11]. Late adolescent age was associated with a high risk of sexual behaviour and it is associated with substance use, mental distress, and loneliness [12]. An Indian study found that most adolescents were aware of the root cause of HIV/AIDS [13]. The above literature shows that adolescents, students, or youth lack awareness of HIV/AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases.

HIV/AIDS-related awareness classes or programs are necessary for healthy human life. Therefore, the awareness programs need to start from the adolescent stage. The current study tries to assess the awareness of secondary school students about HIV/AIDS.

**Methodology**

A cross-sectional descriptive study with a mixed-method approach was conducted in 19 schools in Kollam District, Kerala. The cluster sampling method was adopted for data collection. For quantitative data, the Indian Adolescents Health questionnaire (IAHQ) was administered among 600 secondary school students. The Malayalam/English version dichotomous questions of IAHQ were ‘Ever heard of HIV infection or AIDS’, ‘At your school, have you ever been taught about HIV or AIDS’, and ‘Ever talked about HIV or AIDS with your parents’ were taken for analysis [14]. The statistical analysis was done through SPSS version 23.0 such as frequency and Mann-Whitney U test.

Altogether, 24 parents and 24 teachers were selected for a face-to-face interview. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for qualitative data collection. The analysis was done through ATLAS ti software.

**Results**

Out of 600 secondary school students, socio-demographic details found that the mean age was 14.98 with a standard deviation of 1.41, more than half of them were female; the majority follow Hinduism and most of them belonged to the upper-middle socio-economic class. The quantitative findings are as follows

Table 1 illustrates the HIV/AIDS awareness of secondary school students. The majority (80.2%) of secondary school students have heard about HIV infection or AIDS and the rest of them have not (19.8%). More than half (53.7%) of them stated that their school never taught about HIV/AIDS. Most of the secondary school students (65.3%) never discussed HIV/AIDS with their parents.

Awareness Domains	Yes (%)	No (%)
Ever heard of HIV infection or AIDS	481 (80.2)	119 (19.8)
At your school, have you ever been taught about HIV or AIDS	278 (46.3)	322 (53.7)
Ever talked about HIV or AIDS with your parents	208 (34.7)	392 (65.3)

**Table 1:** HIV/AIDS awareness of secondary school students.

Source: computed figures in parentheses are percentages.

Awareness Domains	Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	P-value
Heard of HIV infection or AIDS	Male	283	289.65	41,785	.03*
	Female	317	310.18		
School taught about HIV or AIDS	Male	283	299.08	44,453	.82
	Female	317	301.77		
Talked about HIV or AIDS with parents	Male	283	279.05	38,784	.001**
	Female	317	319.65		

**Table 2:** Relationship between Gender of respondents and HIV/AIDS Awareness Domains.

Source: computed P < 0.05\*, P < 0.01\*\*.

The relationship between the gender of respondents and HIV/AIDS awareness domains is depicted in table 2. Significant gender differences are found in the domain of ‘heard of HIV infection or AIDS’. This indicates that more female secondary school students lack awareness of HIV infection or AIDS (U = 41,785; P < 0.05\*) than males. High significant gender differences are revealed in ‘talked about HIV or AIDS with parents’. This indicates that more female adolescents never discussed HIV or AIDS with their parents (U = 38,784; P < 0.01\*\*) as compared to their male counterparts.

The parents’ mean age was 41.63 with a standard deviation of 3.48. The majority of parents who participated in the study were female, most of them educated till post-graduation and worked in the private sector. The mean age of 24 teachers was calculated at 44.17 with a standard deviation of 4.93. The majority of them were female, most of them educated till post-graduation and their teaching experience mean years was 15 years with a standard deviation of 4.85.

There were 19 parents and 7 teachers who stated that the secondary school students lack awareness regarding sexuality, sexual-

ly transmitted diseases, and prevention. The major qualitative findings also revealed that there is a lack of awareness programmes both in schools and in the community (Table 3).

Respondent	Socio-demographic details	Verbatim
Parent 3	Male, 46 years, Government school and Rural setting	Awareness classes are often lacking for children and parents in schools.
Parent 5	Female, 40 years, Private school and Urban setting	Although conducting an awareness class among children is important...It will not be accepted by them. They and their friends will say that what they say is right.
Teacher 19	Female, 46 years, Government school, Rural setting	Problematic children do not attend such awareness classes. They rarely come to regular class...that is a big barrier.
Teacher 20	Female, 40 years, Private school and Rural setting	The school often does not have time to give awareness classes...Often because the syllabus has been completed...tight schedule...Awareness classes are held once a year.

**Table 3:** Major findings of Key Informant Interviews.

**Discussion**

Awareness is the apt solution for avoiding sexually transmitted diseases. The current study attempted to assess the HIV/AIDS awareness of secondary school students and found that a fifth of secondary school students had not heard about HIV or AIDS. A study found that a tenth had not heard about HIV/AIDS [6]. Another study found that less than forty percent of youth do not know about HIV [7]. The studies had different prevalence rates on awareness about HIV or AIDS. However, it goes to show that secondary school students have poor knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

More than half of secondary school students mentioned that their school never taught about HIV/AIDS and never discussed HIV/AIDS with their parents. A study found that less than a tenth of children had heard about HIV/AIDS from school platforms [15] while another found that little more than a quarter of high school students got HIV/AIDS-related information from parents or siblings [16]. This indicates that secondary school students are not discussing HIV/AIDS in school and at home.

The current study revealed that females comparatively lack knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS than males. A similar study found that there were significant gender differences in sexual attitudes [17].

The qualitative findings of the current study found that secondary school students are not getting awareness classes from their respective institutions or community. A review of the literature found that secondary school students lack awareness of HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases [18]. Another study found that high risk in sexual behavior is associated with substance use, mental distress, and loneliness [12]. Therefore awareness is one of the major factors to reduce the health risk-behaviour of secondary school students.

The limitations of the study include no comparison of rural and urban settings, no focus group discussions, and lacking domains of knowledge and awareness.

**Conclusion**

More than a fifth of secondary school students lack knowledge and awareness of HIV infections or AIDS. Secondary school students are vulnerable to a large number of physical and psychological risks such as sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy which can affect their entire life. Therefore prevention of such through awareness needs to be organized in different settings. There is a need to strengthen a systematic approach to spread the knowledge, awareness, and preventive measures on sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. Abundant support and programs from school and the community can help secondary school students to practice a healthy life.

**Conflict of Interest**

Nil.

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