

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to determine the knowledge, attitudes and practices related to STD and AIDS among youth living in slum and shanty communities in the city of Colombo and to evaluate the effectiveness of an educational program in changing these.

This study was carried out in three phases. In phase one, a descriptive cross sectional study (pre intervention survey) was conducted in a representative sample of youth selected from the slum and shanty communities in two randomly selected administrative districts of Colombo city (administrative districts 3 and 4). In phase two, the educational intervention was implemented in administrative district 4 while the other served as the control group. In phase three the effectiveness of the educational intervention program was evaluated by a post intervention survey.

Data were collected by an interviewer administered questionnaire. Eight hundred and sixty six unmarried youth in the two administrative districts were interviewed at the pre intervention survey.

A wide disparity was identified between the knowledge on STD and AIDS. A significant number (42.2%) had never heard of STD while only 4.3% had not heard of AIDS. Among those who had heard of the diseases the knowledge on modes of

transmission, investigations and treatment was satisfactory. However, several misconceptions were identified regarding transmission. Knowledge on preventive methods was poor. Only 45.3% in the sample had ever heard of condoms.

Attitudes towards persons with STD/AIDS were more positive than attitudes towards diseases. Youth downplayed the risk of their getting STD or AIDS to that of their peers ($p < 0.001$). The perception of risk for AIDS was much lower than that for STD ($p < 0.04$).

Risk behaviors were common among males. Injection drug use was very minimal. In the sample 39.0% of males and 5.6% of females had sexual relationships. The sexual partners of males were girl friends(22.9%), Female Sex Workers(11.0%) and other men(18.2%). Safer sex practices were uncommon among sexually active males. Only 16.6% used a condom at the last sexual exposure. Condom non use at the last sexual encounter was significantly associated with lower level of general education ($p < 0.01$) and negative attitudes towards condoms ($p < 0.02$).

The health education program included basic facts on STD/AIDS. More emphasis was placed on STD, safer sex practices and services available for persons with STD/AIDS. Health wardens attached to administrative district 4 were selected as out reach workers. Multiple channels such as lecture/discussions, group discussions, posters, leaflets and video program were used to disseminate messages. Participation of the

community leaders and peer leaders was obtained for the organization of the program. The intervention was conducted for four months period from April to July 1995.

Post intervention survey was carried out 2 months after the completion of the intervention in which the 759 of the 866 who participated in the preintervention survey were interviewed. The findings of the post intervention survey, indicated that the experimental group as compared with the control group showed a marked improvement in overall knowledge ($p < 0.0001$) and had more positive attitudes towards patients with STD/AIDS ($p < 0.0001$). An improvement in safer sex practices was also observed in the post test ($p < 0.001$). However, no change was observed on attitudes towards the diseases ($p > 0.05$).

This study has demonstrated that youth do acquire new knowledge and change attitudes and behavior when exposed to a well planned, comprehensive educational intervention. This change may be temporary in nature, however, it may be maintained by continuing reinforcement from time to time. This aspect need to be researched further.