

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The HIV epidemic is spreading throughout in South East Asia. Sri Lanka remains a low prevalence country with estimated sero-prevalence of HIV rate of 0.02% in antenatal mothers. However up to end of 2008 a cumulative number of 31 children got infected from mother to child transmission. Mother to child transmission of HIV can be effectively prevented if mothers' HIV status is known early. Therefore, studying knowledge and attitudes towards mother to child transmission and prevention of STI and HIV and attitudes towards VDRL and HIV testing among newly registered antenatal mothers is important to strengthen the existing standard of package of care for antenatal mothers and implement HIV testing among antenatal mothers in future.

**Objectives:** To study the knowledge and attitudes towards mother to child transmission and prevention of HIV and STI and attitudes towards VDRL and HIV testing among newly registered antenatal mothers in MOH area Ragama.

**Methods:** Cross sectional study was carried out by using interviewer administered questionnaire on 400 antenatal mothers. Data was analyzed by using the statistical package SPSS version 16.

**Results:** The mean age of mothers was 27.7 (SD= 4.9) years and range was 15-44 years. Largest proportion (38.0%) of pregnant mothers was within 25-29 year age group. Teenage pregnancy rate was 3.5%. Thirty six percent of the mothers had studied up to grade 6 -10. Only 33% have completed their ordinary level. Twenty six percent had passed GCE (A/L). Majority, 65.2% have lived in Ragama MOH area for over 5 years. Majority were Sinhalese and Buddhists. Except one, all mothers were married and living with their husbands. Majority (86%) were unemployed. Only, 46% had family income between Rs10, 000 and Rs20, 000. Forty percent were in their first pregnancy.

Of the antenatal mothers 98% and 72% have ever heard of about HIV and sexually transmitted infection respectively. Their main source of information on HIV and STIs was television.

Newspapers were mentioned by 48% and 52% of mothers on HIV and STIs respectively.

Majority (85.9%) knew that unprotected sex is a method of HIV transmission.

More than 75% had correct knowledge on methods that do not carry the risks of transmission of HIV. Ninety six percent antenatal mothers had knowledge about having sex with one faithful partner can help to reduce HIV transmission. Ninety four percent knew that having multiple partners can transmit HIV virus. Seventy one percent had knowledge on changing partners can transmit the virus. Total knowledge on sexual behavior was good. Fifty six percent of antenatal mothers knew that women with HIV can get pregnant. Majority (61.3%) believed HIV infected mother does not look healthy. Only 12.6% mothers had knowledge on the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.

Of the 288 mothers who had ever heard about STIs, 61.5% were not able to name any of the symptoms of STIs. Only 38% of mothers had good knowledge on individual STIs and symptoms. However, 87% knew regarding mother to child transmission of STIs. Fifty percent knew that MTCT of sexually transmitted infections could be prevented.

Majority (51.4%) prefers to seek testing from government hospitals for sexually transmitted infections whereas Sexually transmitted disease clinic is preferred by 19.4%. Forty nine percent prefers to seek testing from government hospitals for HIV infections. Sexually transmitted disease clinic is preferred by 12.8% mothers.

**Conclusions:** Majority (90.5%) had knowledge on HIV but only 3.5% knew that MTCT of HIV. Knowledge on HIV and STI was poor. This was more obvious towards MTCT of HIV. Attitude towards antenatal VDRL and HIV testing was not satisfactory with only half of them having positive attitude. Television appears to be the best source of information on HIV and STIs. Health care providers as a source of information on HIV and STIs were identified by a small proportion of antenatal mothers. In this population, private sector VDRL testing appears to be more common.