

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Introduction**

Despite major advancements in prevention and treatment, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) remains one of the most challenging health and social issue affecting humanity across the globe. The post-exposure prophylaxis following sexual exposure (PEPSE) is one of the most important biomedical interventions proven to reduce acquisition of new HIV infections through unprotected sex.

### **Objectives**

The study aimed to describe the knowledge, attitude, and perceived barriers for the provision of HIV post-exposure prophylaxis following sexual exposure (PEPSE) among healthcare workers in STD clinics, Sri Lanka.

### **Methods**

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 148 health care workers attached to 29 STD clinics in Sri Lanka who were recruited by stratified random sampling technique. The data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The frequency tables were used to describe categorical variables and measures of central tendency were used to describe continuous variables. The factors associated with knowledge, attitudes, and perceived barriers to provide PEPSE were assessed.

### **Results**

Majority of the study participants were females. Although the comprehensive HIV knowledge indicator of the study group was 85%, only 64% of participants had good knowledge on PEPSE. Overall, around 62% had favorable attitudes toward

PEPSE and 59% believed that there would be barriers to providing or prescribing PEPSE to clients in their clinic settings. A significantly high proportion of health care workers attached to STD clinics in western province believed that PEPSE is an effective HIV prevention measure ( $p = .048$ ). When compared with health care workers who had working experience less than 5 years in STD clinic setting, a significantly high proportion of health care workers with more than 5 years working experience in the same field believed that PEPSE was an effective measure to prevent HIV ( $p = .015$ ). There were no significant associations between socio demographic variables and overall attitudes toward PEPSE. A significant association was observed between health care workers willingness to provide/prescribe PEPSE and their attitudes toward it ( $p = .001$ ). Those who had favorable attitudes toward PEPSE were more likely to prescribe PEPSE than those who had unfavorable attitudes. However, no association was found between their willingness to prescribe/provide PEPSE and overall knowledge on PEPSE. Similarly, either presence or absence of perceived barriers to prescribe/provide PEPSE was not significantly associated with the health care workers willingness to prescribe/provide PEPSE.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Though the participants had good knowledge of HIV, their knowledge of PEPSE was inadequate. The majority had favorable attitudes towards PEPSE but only few were certain that they would prescribe or provide PEPSE for clients. Therefore, it is highly recommended to carry out innovative awareness programmes during in service and preservice training for STD clinic staff aiming to improve their knowledge and attitudes towards PEPSE to increase uptake of PEPSE by clients through island wide STD clinics.