



Myths & Misconception Among Young on Sex & HIV/AIDS – An Overview

KEYWORDS

Dr. A. Thomas William

Associate Professor & UGC – Post Doctoral Awardee, Dept. of Applied Research, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram, Dindigul District, Tamilnadu, India – 624 301

ABSTRACT In India there are lots of barriers for parents, youth and teens to talk and confer about sex as ours is a culturally and religiously dominant nation. Studies on sexuality and sex myth are gaining momentum these days due to the alarming spread of HIV/AIDS. A lot of myths are generated due to lack of autonomy for gaining knowledge and these myths and misconceptions play a major role in understanding the sexuality erroneously. In order to identify and classify various myths on sexuality and HIV prevailing among the community this initiative was undertaken. Case studies, Key Informant interviews and FGD's were employed. The myths and misconceptions identified are classified into sexuality, pregnancy, myth-prevent, myth-spread and myth-cure. It is necessary to give a basic knowledge in the form of awareness programme to eradicate myth on sex among youth involving various stakeholders through Openness in communication, discuss the issues with parents, Sex education, Research and Training which could prevent youth entering into HIV/AIDS arena and more than that this research opens up avenues for future empirical researches with adolescents, youth, rural population, girls and other productive groups in the field to get the real picture.

INTRODUCTION

The entire world of sexuality and HIV/AIDS is shrouded in mystery for the average Indian population. There are hundreds of myths and 'false beliefs' on sexuality and HIV/AIDS added and nurtured, day in and day out. Sex related issues are seldom focused or discussed by appropriate and informed agencies. Many young people have serious misperceptions about STDs and HIV/AIDS (Kumar, 1995). The various sources either available or accessible by the target group are not scientific or self-reliant. The information so received is neither tested nor proved. They believe in the knowledge they acquire and the source is mostly their peers (VHAI, 1990). Hence there are lot of misconceptions prevailing among the youth population which is evidently focused by researchers in the field.

Studies on sexuality and sex myth are gaining momentum these days due to the alarming spread of HIV/AIDS. The influence of mass media and the sources in providing actual information on the subject are not most of the time reliable and verifiable (Hublely et. al, 1995). The sources instead of promoting sexual knowledge, spreads false messages and misconceptions. There are also dangerous gaps in young people's knowledge of STD transmission

Today's youth become prey to these illuminations and finally end up in problems and dangers. Providing proven facts and information to the youth could provide solution to their sexual queries and guide them in proper direction. With this backdrop, the present study was conducted with the objective is to identify and differentiate myth and facts on sex.

CULTURAL BARRIERS

Many of the religious and mythological notions in India have been interpreted in different ways at different point of time. People often have a tendency to construct social prescriptions for themselves on the basis of these interpretations. Due to the lack of scientific knowledge, people easily derive unscientific, cause and effect equations (UNESCO, 2002). Though India is culturally and religiously dominant in every respect it has its own dynamism in the field of sex education. There are barriers for parents, youth and teens to talk and confer about sex. Hence there are many such misconceptions or myths prevailing on sex related issues (Abel, G.G. & Osborn, C., 1992)

A lot of myths are generated due to lack of autonomy for gaining knowledge. Moreover the influence of societal norms on one hand and myths and misconceptions on the other make a large section of Indian men and women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, as unprotected sex is the most important route of HIV transmission (UNESCO, 2002). Research on myths revealed that in India certain gender bias social norms, laws and practices which lead Indian women to greater suppression increase their exposure to HIV infection and worsen their situation at post infection stage. One among the factors that increase women's vulnerability to HIV infection is gender bias myths regarding sexuality, STD, HIV/AIDS. Some misbelieves prevent them to go for checkup (Mazumdar Vina and N.Krishnaji, 2002). Under these circumstances, it is of a great need to make an individual aware of the MYTH. Serious attempts are necessary to educate – what is a fact against the myth.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the myths and misconception prevailing among youth on sexuality and HIV/AIDS
- To classify the myths and misconceptions according to the relevant category for better understanding
- To Suggest suitable measures to reduce the myths and misconceptions so as to prevent the youth from entering into HIV/AIDS

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Case Studies – Interviews on life experiences and exposures on myths and misconceptions from HIV positive people have been recorded with a view to understand the myths and misconceptions prevailing and/or sharing and/or practiced among these people.

B. Key Informants Interview – Selected Integrated Counseling and testing centre counselor, positive network leaders, NGO personnel, opinion leaders, At risk population and researchers in the field were interviewed so that more insight could be gained on the myths and misconceptions on sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

C. Focus Group Discussions - In order to obtain various myths and misconceptions prevailing in the community Focused Group Discussions were held with personnel in the field. The field educators, Counselors working in the Inte-

grated Testing and Counselling Centres (ICTC), NGO field staff who are working for the HIV/AIDS projects, Members of Positive Networks and researchers were participated in the Focused Group Discussion at the District levels and Two Focused Group Discussions were conducted at the Head Quarters of two districts of ICTC centres. More over informal discussions were held with HIV/AIDS persons through ICTC and positive networks. These FGD's and informal meetings were helpful in getting the myths and misconceptions actually in practice. The list obtained from FGD's and informal meetings were categorized and added with the literatures already available and presented below.

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTION

Myths and misconceptions play a major role in understanding the sexuality wrongly. Many a time the peers, community and society influence the adolescents and youth in discover and spreading of myths. The prominent myths on sexuality and HIV/AIDS are listed below:

COMMON SEXUALITY

- Oral sex is safer than vaginal sex
- Certain food items induce good sex mood for some people
- Sexual enjoyment depends on the size of the sex organs
- After a certain age, sex is no longer important
- Comparatively men has more sexual urge than women
- Most men lose their sexual drive around the age of 50
- Masturbation is done exclusively by males
- There is something wrong with a person, who hasn't had sex when he is 18
- Nocturnal Emissions is a sign of STD
- A women doesn't get pregnant during her first sexual intercourse
- Semen is the essence of life; its loss damages one's health
- Men always want and are always ready to have sex
- All teenagers are having sexual intercourse these days

PREGNANCY

- ❖ During 'period' there is no chance for a Female to get pregnant
- ❖ No pregnancy during unprotected sex if the man pulling out before ejaculation
- ❖ Sexual Intercourse during pregnancy harms the health of women
- ❖ Premature ejaculation only affects young men and not all men.
- ❖ No pregnancy while having sex standing up, or in the shower or bath
- ❖ There are no possibilities for females to get pregnant if taken tablets
- ❖ It's safe to have sex as soon as taking the tablet to prevent pregnancy
- ❖ Missing one tablet is not at all a problem
- ❖ Urinating immediately after sex washes out sperm and prevents pregnancy

CONDOM USAGE

- o All men hate using condoms
- o Condoms are completely safe
- o If a condom breaks; nothing can be done

MYTHS ON HIV/AIDS

A. MYTH PREVENT

- Cleaning the penis with lemon before having sex prevents HIV
- Every individual with HIV will eventually develop AIDS
- While taking tablets prevent pregnancy also protects you from contracting HIV
- Cleaning the sex organs with alcohol before sexual intercourse prevents HIV
- Cleaning the sex organs with soda water before sexual intercourse prevents HIV

B. MYTH SPREAD

- People who are HIV already and are sexually active, no longer need to practice safer sex
- HIV cannot spread through oral sex
- HIV cannot spread in one sexual encounter
- HIV cannot spread to another woman by having sex with her
- HIV persons whose viral load is undetectable, cannot spread HIV
- HIV spread to people who are living around with HIV-positive persons
- Mosquitoes spread HIV
- Persons under treatment for HIV, cannot spread virus
- With modern drugs, no need to worry about HIV
- When both partner are HIV positive -- there's no reason to practice safer sex
- HIV spread from saliva, toilet seats or discarded needles
- HIV positive people spread the virus to their children
- Person who are HIV positive and are sexually active no need to practice safer sex
- HIV cannot from one sexual encounter
- AIDS can be spread by kissing, hugging, or shaking hands
- HIV spreads through Breathing the same air as someone who is HIV-positive
- HIV spreads through touching a toilet seat after used by HIV-positive person
- HIV spreads through drinking from a water fountain
- HIV spreads through sharing and eating utensils with an HIV-positive person
- HIV spreads through using exercise equipment at a gym

C. MYTH CURE

- ✓ HIV can be cured by having sex with pre-matured girls
- ✓ HIV can be cured by having sex with a virgin
- ✓ I HIV can be cured by having sex with donkey
- ✓ Transfusion of tested blood can cure HIV
- ✓ Making a burn with copper coin on the wrist cures HIV
- ✓ Avoiding Non Vegetarian food cures HIV
- ✓ Block magic cures HIV
- ✓ 'Fasting for one meal' for selected weeks cures HIV
- ✓ Siddha and/or local country medicines cures HIV
- ✓ Repentance religious practices cures HIV

D. MYTH – HIV GENERAL

- AIDS is genocide
- It is easy to identify HIV-positive
- HIV is something only gay people get
- People with HIV look weak and ill
- The results of HIV tests are not confidential
- HIV does not cause AIDS
- There is no life for any person after became HIV-positive

IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION REQUIRED

Under the strong influence of culture, discussions on sex have become a taboo subject. It narrows down the space to talk about sex and sexuality and therefore hinders sex education. Lack of positive language on sex makes sex a more hidden and obscure subject for the adolescent population. Due to the absence of proper sex education, sex becomes an issue of uninformed discussion among peers, which, in turn, results in unscientific and incorrect information among young boys and girls. The lack of knowledge on sex continues even in later phases of life leading to complete darkness.

CONCLUSION

The absence of clearly-defined, transparent and socially-accountable, sexual mores, and the prevalence of fostered myths and secrecy, spells disastrous implications not only for the spread of HIV/AIDS in India, but also in the way it is confronted. It is also to be observed that only few and rarely studies are to be conducted on this theme. Finally this research opens up avenues for future empirical researches with youth, rural population, girls and other productive groups in the field to get the real picture.

SUGGESTIONS TO OVERCOME MYTH

It is to be suggested that myths like these may lead the youth indulge in inappropriate decisions with regard to their sexual life. Many of the health practices and beliefs are indirectly responsible for building misconceptions. Hence community exerts strong influence over the members with regard to these customs and practices and they cannot be erased from the minds of the people. And hence these myths need to be corrected through proper sex education and to guide

them by explaining the reality. It is necessary to give a basic knowledge in the form of awareness programme to eradicate myth on sex among youth involving various stakeholders and specifically the ICTC people, positive networks and Development Initiatives in the field through Openness in communication, discuss the issues with parents, Beginning discussions at an early stage, Positive messages, Sex education, Research and Training could prevent youth entering into HIV/AIDS arena. v

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