



AWARENESS ABOUT ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY DISEASE SYNDROME (AIDS) AMONG PREGNANT FEMALES OF DISTRICT SRINAGAR-A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY.

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: The HIV/AIDS is a pandemic that continues its life threatening assail in different parts of the world. India too faces the wrath of this death dealing disease. The transcendence of HIV is a threat to mankind and is a blow to the advancement of our economy. National Adult (15-49 years) HIV prevalence is estimated at 0.22% which accounts for 23.49 lakhs population among which 3.4% of children and around 21 thousand pregnant females. It is estimated that about 29 million pregnancies occur annually in India and among these approximately 36000 pregnancies occur in HIV positive women and in absence of any intervention a cohort of about 11000 babies will be born with HIV infection annually. A detailed account about the knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS among the pregnant females of Jammu and Kashmir is lacking. So this study was done to get an overview about the awareness regarding HIV in pregnant females of Jammu and Kashmir. **METHODOLOGY:** A cross-sectional study was conducted from March 2020 to August 2020 in district Srinagar. District Srinagar has four health zones and one medical block. This study was undertaken after required permission was given by the concerned authorities. **RESULTS:** A total of 329 females participated in our study. The mean age of the females was 28.07 ± 4.31 years. The mean years of schooling in the study participants were 6.12 years. Majority of the females belonged to either socio-economic class II (36%) or Class III (38%), lived in joint families and most of them were in second trimester of their pregnancy (40%). Out of 329 females enrolled 224(68.08%) females had heard about HIV/AIDS. Majority of the females who had heard about HIV/AIDS were in the age group of 26-30 years. Knowledge was least in females in the age group of 36-40 years. **CONCLUSION:**

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

The HIV/AIDS is a pandemic that continues its life threatening assail in different parts of the world. In 2019 about 1.7 million (1.2 million-2.2 million) new infections were reported worldwide adding to a total of 38 million people living with HIV. It accounted for about 0.7 million (500 000-970 000) deaths globally and 48% of the people living with HIV globally are females (1).

India too faces the wrath of this death dealing disease. The transcendence of HIV is a threat to mankind and is a blow to the advancement of our economy. National Adult (15-49 years) HIV prevalence is estimated at 0.22% which accounts for 23.49 lakhs population among which 3.4% of children and around 21 thousand pregnant females (2). It is estimated that about 29 million pregnancies occur annually in India and among these approximately 36000 pregnancies occur in HIV positive women and in absence of any intervention a cohort of about 11000 babies will be born with HIV infection annually. (3)

The prevalence of HIV has slowly tightened its grip on Jammu and Kashmir as over 4,300 patients, including 131 orphans and 225 widows, have been tested HIV positive in the state so far. In the Kashmir region, including Leh, the prevalence of HIV is quite low. The number of HIV patients here is 228, including 58 non-locals. (4)

Despite years of calling for, awareness raising and endowment for control programmes, AIDS continues to be a global challenge, fear, stigma and ignorance being the main contributors. In absence of effective treatment and vaccine, awareness about HIV is the best approach for prevention of this disease.

Although the state of Jammu and Kashmir has a low prevalence of HIV but data from NFHS -4 survey revealed that the knowledge of HIV among population is less. Only 21% of females in the reproductive age-group had comprehensive knowledge about HIV. It is noted that pregnant women are much receptive on health matters so assessment of knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS among pregnant women is of utmost importance. A detailed account about the knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS among the pregnant females of Jammu and Kashmir is lacking. So this study was done to get an

overview about the awareness regarding HIV in pregnant females of Jammu and Kashmir.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted from March 2020 to August 2020 in district Srinagar. District Srinagar has four health zones and one medical block. This study was undertaken after required permission was given by the concerned authorities.

All females attending the Primary health centers of district Srinagar were approached and their consent for participation in the study was sought. Confidentiality of the data was ascertained. A total of 329 pregnant females were enrolled for the study. The sampling was convenient as very less number of females visited the hospital due to Covid 19 pandemic.

The females were enrolled in the study irrespective of their gestational age and parity. After explaining the objectives of the study to the females, data regarding the sociodemographic characters of the participants and also regarding the knowledge about AIDS transmission and prevention was collected using a semi-structured, close-ended and a pretested questionnaire.

The data was entered in MS Excel and then analyzed using Software EPI INFO 7.

The data was expressed as frequencies and proportions and tabulated.

RESULTS:

A total of 329 females participated in our study. The mean age of the females was 28.07 ± 4.31 years. The mean years of schooling in the study participants was 6.12 years. Majority of the females belonged to either socio-economic class II (36%) or Class III (38%), lived in joint families and most of them were in second trimester of their pregnancy (40%).

General knowledge

Out of 329 females enrolled 224(68.08%) females had heard about HIV/AIDS. Majority of the females who had heard about HIV/AIDS were in the age group of 26-30 years. Knowledge was least in females in the age group of 36-40 years.

Table 1: Source of information.

Source of information	Frequency (224)	Percentage
Radio	145	64.73
Television	113	50.45
Friends	26	11.61
Health workers	21	9.38
Relatives	13	5.80
Religious Homes	13	5.80
Posters/Newspapers	7	3.13
Neighbours	3	1.34

In majority of the females, the source of information was radio followed by television.

Knowledge about transmission

In an answer to the question regarding the route of transmission of HIV/AIDS females gave several answers, most being the “sexual transmission”, which was given by 51.78% females. The second most common route according to the females was mother to child transmission which was given by 43.75% females. Females with higher level of education had correct knowledge about the correct routes of transmission. 38.83% females knew that even a healthy individual can be infected with HIV/AIDS.

Table 2: Knowledge about the mode of transmission.

Mode of transmission	Frequency (224)	Percentage
Through sexual intercourse	116	51.78
Sharing of needles /sharp objects	79	35.26
Blood transfusion	66	29.46
Mother to child	98	43.75
Multiple sexual partners	95	42.41
Hugging	29	12.94
By sharing food item /shaking hands with HIV positive person	35	15.62
By mosquito bites	31	13.83

Misconceptions about the mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS included transmission by hugging, shaking hands and sharing of food items with HIV positive person including transmission by mosquito bites.

Knowledge about prevention

In response to the questions about ways to prevent the disease transmission females answered differently depending upon the route they thought was responsible for the transmission of the disease.

Table:3 Knowledge about methods of prevention of sexual transmission

Methods of prevention	Frequency (224)	Percentage
Condom use	138	61.60
Being faithful to the partner	126	56.25
Abstinence	112	50.00

Most of the females (61.60) considered condom use as the method of prevention of the sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS. Some of the females (8.51%) thought that condoms cannot prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS. However a considerable proportion of the females (25.53%) had no idea about the effectiveness of condoms as a method of prevention of sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS.

LSCS-lower segment caesarean section.

Table:4 Knowledge about the methods of prevention of mother to child transmission

Method of prevention	Frequency (224)	Percentage
No idea	104	46.42
LSCS	61	27.23
Abortion	26	11.60
Stop breast milk	23	10.26
Medicine	7	3.12
Others	3	1.33

Most of the responders had no idea how to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS. Fair percentage (27.23) of the females believed that LSCS (lower segment caesarean section) can prevent the newborn from contracting maternal HIV infection. Only few females

considered stopping breast milk as a method of preventing mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Knowledge about the health facility

Out of the 224 females who had heard about HIV/AIDS, only 33.03% had knowledge about the place where they can be screened for HIV/AIDS and 29.46% knew that they had been tested for HIV/AIDS.

DISCUSSION

Out of 329 participants enrolled for the study 224 females (68.08%) females had heard about HIV/AIDS, however the comprehensive knowledge was on lower side. Similar results were shown by Rahbar et al in his study which revealed that 69% of the females were aware of the disease (6). In another study done by Janahi EM 63% females were aware of HIV/AIDS (8). In our study the comprehensive knowledge was on lower side. Comprehensive knowledge is knowing that consist use of condoms during sexual intercourse and having just one faithful partner can reduce the chance of getting HIV/AIDS. Knowing that a healthy-looking person can have HIV/AIDS and rejecting two common misconceptions about prevention and transmission of HIV/AIDS (5).

The mean age of the females was 28.07±4.31 years. It is similar to the study done by Swati Gupta where majority of the females were in the age group of 20-24 years (7). The mean years of schooling was 6.12 years. Majority of the females belonged to socio-economic class III (38%) followed by socio-economic class II (36%). Source of information in majority of females was radio (64.73%) followed by television (50.45%). Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Jyoti Dattaramji Bhise (9). However, in our study main source was radio as the respondents belonged to lower socio-economic class and could not afford a television. More than half of the females (51.78%) believed that the disease is mainly transmitted through the sexual route. A community-based study conducted by Vijay Shree regarding awareness of HIV/AIDS amongst pregnant females also reported that sexual transmission was believed to be the main route of transmission of the disease (10). Majority of the females (61.17%) of females did not know that a healthy-looking person can be suffering from HIV/AIDS so they had idea that they can be infected from apparently healthy sexual partners (11). A good percentage of females (43.75%) had the knowledge about the mother to child transmission of the disease, however the exact mechanism of transmission was lacking. The finding is almost similar to the study conducted by Vijay Shree (10). Small proportion of respondents had some misconceptions about the disease transmission like the disease is transmitted by hugging (13%), sharing food items/shaking hands (16%) and mosquito bites (13.83%). Similar findings were shown by study conducted by K.S.Negi.(12).

Majority of the females believed that use of condoms will prevent a female from contracting HIV/AIDS. Similar results were shown in a study conducted by R.Busulwa (13). 46.42% females had no idea how to prevent mother to child transmission. Some females however believed that LSCS (27.23%), termination of pregnancy (11.60%) and stopping breast milk (10.26%) can prevent mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS. This could be due to the fact that the majority of the females had no idea that there is transmission of infection from mother to child. Also the females who had some idea about mother to child transmission were not sure about the exact mechanism of transmission of disease. Even though the subcenters and the Primary Health Centers in our field practice area are equipped to screen all the pregnant females for HIV/AIDS. Only 33.03% of females had knowledge of place where they could be tested for HIV/AIDS and only 24.36% knew that they had ever been tested for HIV/AIDS.

CONCLUSION:

As we have seen from our study that a good percentage of females had heard about HIV/AIDS there still remains a chunk of population with no idea about a deadly demon called HIV/AIDS because in the absence of the vaccine knowledge is the only weapon to combat this menace. Also the females who had heard about the disease lack a comprehensive knowledge. As we know that little knowledge is dangerous females should be fully educated and counselled about adoption of preventive strategies. Rise in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among pregnant females will transform into high prenatal transmission and reciprocal increase in paediatric AIDS cases which will keep on adding to the number of people living with HIV/AIDS. In addition to ignorance fear and stigma have played their role in increasing the burden of this disease. The awareness camps should focus on abolishing the fear and stigma associated with the disease so

that more and more people volunteer to know about their status and play their part in preventing the transmission of this disease and prevent our economy from becoming a prey in the hands of this exorbitant disease. Not only females but males should also be involved in awareness programmes about HIV/AIDS so that they recognize their role and responsibility in combating this pandemic.

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