

A Study of Awareness of Reproductive Health among College Students of Visakhapatnam

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Abstract:

Introduction: Education about reproductive health should be an integral part of learning process beginning in childhood and continuing into adult life. Education and awareness of reproductive health in girls affects their health status, fertility and sets stage for health beyond reproductive years and affects the health of next generation. Reproductive Health covers a wide range of issues like pregnancy; Contraception & Family Planning; Sexually Transmitted Diseases Prevention. If adolescents can be sensitized about issues of reproductive health, it may contribute to reduction of unwanted pregnancies; reduction in the incidence of S.T.D.s and reduced maternal and infant mortality rates. Hence an attempt was made to assess the extent of awareness of college students regarding reproductive health.

Objectives: To assess the extent of awareness of reproductive health among girl students studying XI & XII classes in two colleges of Visakhapatnam city, Andhra Pradesh.

Methodology: A college based study was conducted in two colleges of Visakhapatnam city through administration of a pre designed questionnaire.

Results: The present study revealed that one third of the girls knew about diagnosis of pregnancy; half of them had knowledge about investigations and one third knew about iron supplementation. Regarding contraception, condoms and female sterilization were known to most of them. Most of the girls knew about H.I.V. infection and they had this knowledge through television. Their knowledge of symptoms and prevention of Sexually transmitted diseases and cancer screening was limited. Most of them felt the need for sex education. Although two thirds of the study group were aware of socioeconomic factors; haemorrhage and difficult delivery causing maternal mortality, none had knowledge about sepsis and hypertension causing maternal deaths.

Conclusions: Awareness of Reproductive health among college students in the areas of pregnancy, contraception and H.I.V. was better than in the areas concerning other reproductive tract infections and cancer screening. Debates and discussions on preventive aspects of R.T.I.s and causes of maternal and infant mortality may help them in developing a positive attitude towards reproductive hygiene; antenatal care, contraception and child birth. Electronic media play a crucial role in imparting knowledge in reproductive health issues.

Keywords: Awareness programmes ; college students; contraception; reproductive health.

I. Introduction

Education and awareness regarding reproductive health in girls and women affects their status and control they have over their own lives. It can have a profound influence on their health and fertility. (1) The empowerment of women is therefore an essential element of health. (2) . Various studies conducted to assess the knowledge levels of adolescents towards reproductive health found that awareness regarding reproductive health issues and HIV /AIDS among adolescent girls was very low .(3) This lack of awareness can lead to early unwanted pregnancies, increased incidence of reproductive tract infections and unsafe abortions. These are the chief causes of maternal morbidity and mortality. (4)

Today, 1.2 billion adolescents stand at the cross roads between childhood and adult world. Around 243 million of them live in India (UNICEF 2011). The reproductive health needs of adolescents have long been neglected. In last 10 years, the importance of information on sexuality and reproduction is being increasingly emphasized.(5) Reproductive health encompasses all aspects of adolescent health. It consists of several distinctive yet related issues such as sex education; menstrual hygiene; reproductive tract infections prevention; abortions; child birth; contraception; cancer screening and maternal mortality. The effects of globalization, rising age of marriage, rapid urbanization and greater opportunities for socialization have heightened the risk of STIs, H.I.V. and unwanted pregnancy. While adolescents have unmet needs for information on reproductive health and services, these are not addressed by parents, schools or the existing health care systems. Sex education should be a lifelong learning process based on acquisition of knowledge and

skills and development of positive values and attitude.(5) It aims at reducing negative outcome from sexual behavior such as unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, and infections with S.T.I.s including H.I.V.

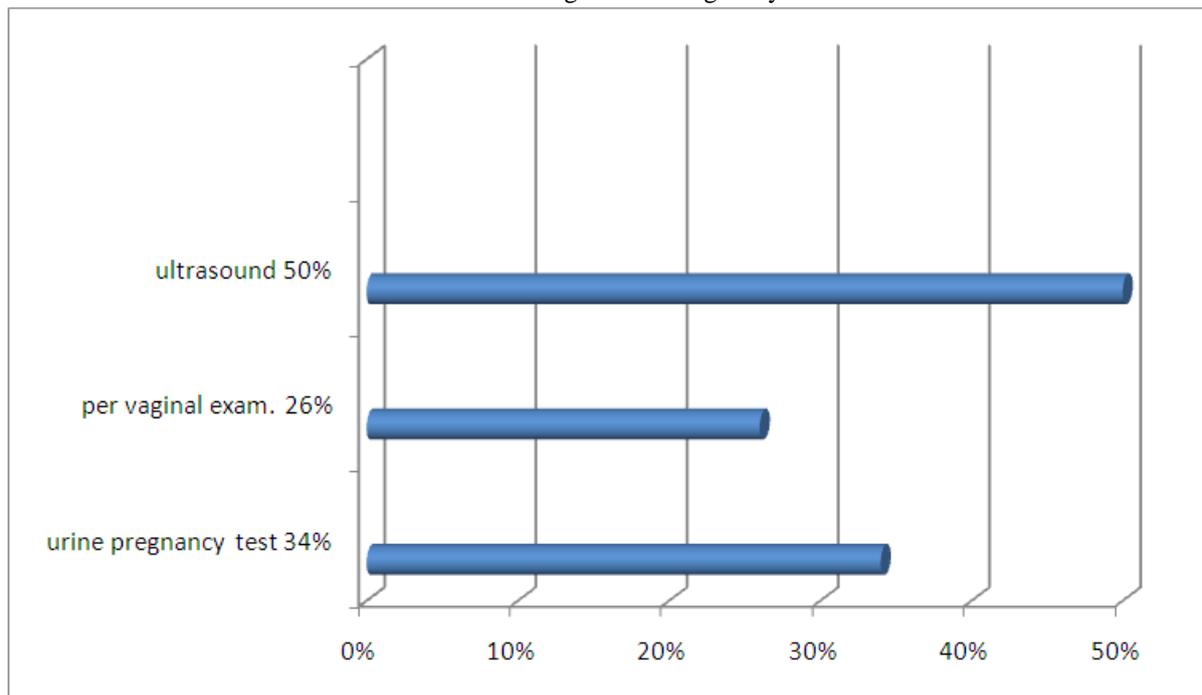
Effective sex awareness programmes should start early in young people before they have developed established patterns of behaviour. Many diseases can occur by lack of awareness, myths. Hence there is need for creating awareness regarding reproductive health among the vulnerable groups.(8) The consequences of S.T.I.s and unwanted pregnancies can be devastating. Young women are at the start of reproductive life and they risk compromising future fertility through tubal occlusion or ectopic pregnancy. the consequences of back street abortions can be dire.(5).

II. Methodology

A college based study was conducted among 500 students of two colleges of visakhapatnam city . After taking permission from school authority, the class teachers were explained the purpose of the study and rapport was build up with the girl students and verbal consent was obtained from them. The girls were administered a pre designed questionnaire which included multiple choice questions. This pre-designed questionnaire included topics relating to reproductive health. Data was analysed manually and relevant statistical tests were applied.

III. Results

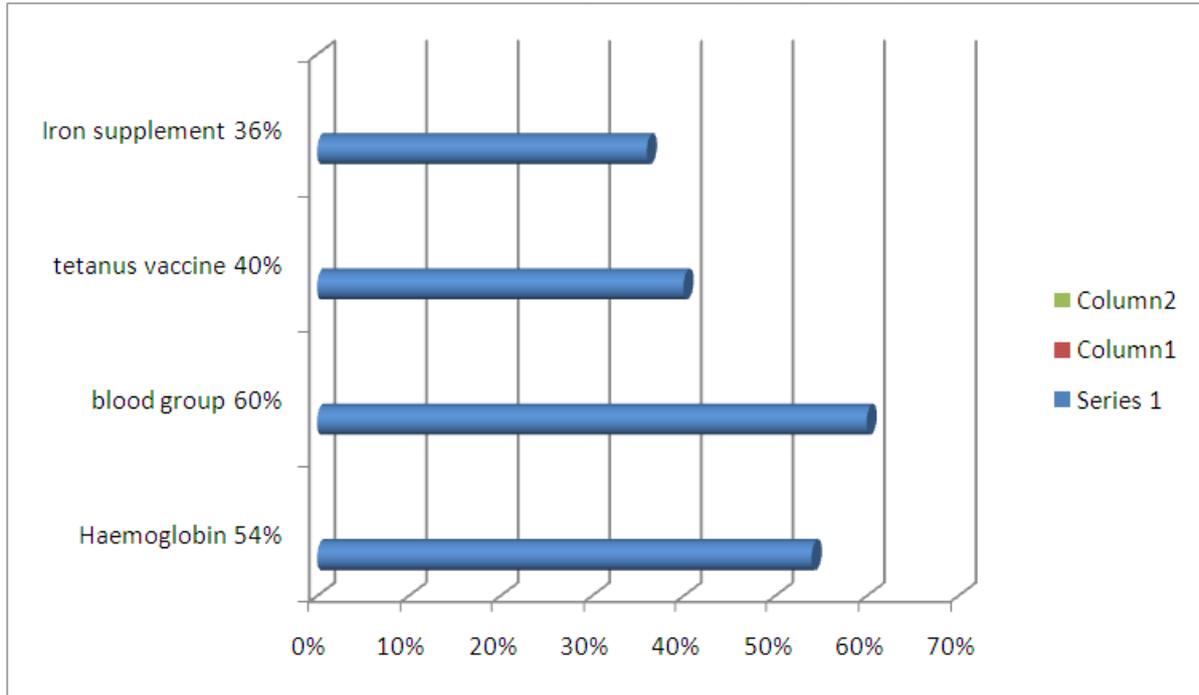
Table I: Diagnosis of Pregnancy



Knowledge of Pregnancy Diagnosis: Among 500 girls studied, regarding diagnosis of pregnancy, 34% knew about urine test, 26% were aware of per vaginal examination and half of them had knowledge of ultrasound being used for diagnosis of pregnancy.

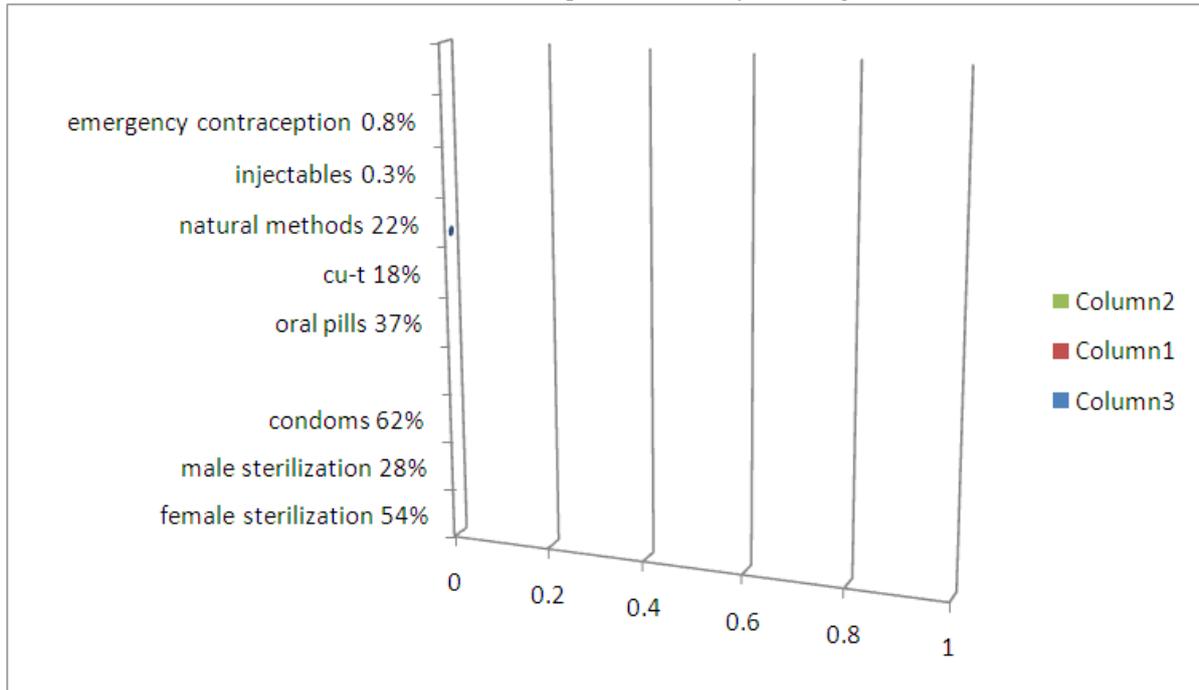
Regarding common investigations and prescribed drugs in pregnancy, 54% were aware of haemoglobin and 60% knew about blood group. Only 40% were aware that vaccination against tetanus is given in pregnancy and 36% picked up iron as a prescribed drug.

Table II: Investigations & prescribed drugs in pregnancy



In Terminology of pregnancy, Caesaran section and Normal delivery were known to 62% of them. Legal age of marriage was known to 37% and infant mortality was known to 18% of them. Average weight of the baby at birth was picked up by only 10% of the study population.

Table III: Contraception and Family Planning



Female Sterilization	Male Sterilization	Condoms	Pills	Cu-T	Natural Methods	Injectables	Emergency Contraception
54%	28%	62%	37%	18%	22%	0.3%	0.8%

The term contraceptive as a preventive measure for pregnancy is known to 70% of them. Two thirds of the study population were aware of Condoms as contraceptives and nearly equal number were knowledgeable of female sterilization. Copper T, a very effective method of interval contraception is known to less than one fifth of study population. Knowledge regarding injectables and emergency contraception is poor. More than half of them knew about tubectomy as a permanent method.

Table IV: Symptoms of Reproductive tract infections:

itching	boils on vulva	abnormal vag. discharge	pain low. abdomen	abnormal bleeding	pain during intercourse
26%	35%	37%	13%	17%	11%

Table I V reveals knowledge of girls about reproductive tract infections. In the present study, 32% of girls were aware of two or more symptoms of R.T.I. .Itching over vulva (26%), ulcers of vulva (35%), lower abdominal pain (13%), pain during intercourse (11%), abnormal vaginal discharge (37%), abnormal bleeding (17%).

knowledge of girls regarding transmission of R.T.I . : Physical relation with infected partner as a method of transmission was known to 36% of the girls, use of unclean cloth during menstruation as a cause of S.T.I. was known to 20%, unclean delivery place and abortion by unskilled person as causes of infection transmission were known only to 3% and 0.2% of the students respectively.

Table V: Knowledge Of S.T.D.S

H.I.V.	Syphilis	Gonorrhoea	Chlamydia	Trichomoniasis	Candidiasis
82%	12%	2%	- -	0.4%	16%

Knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases : Table V reveals that 84% have known about H.I.V; candidiasis was known to 16%, 12% have knowledge about syphilis and only 2% knew of Gonorrhoea and 0.4% knew of trichomoniasis .None are aware of chlamydial infections which are major causes of pelvic inflammatory diseases and tubal occlusions leading to infertility.

Table V I: Source Of Information Regarding H.I.V. & Contraception

Electronic Media		Print Media		Friends	Teachers	Family Members
RDIO 3%	TELEVISION 65%	MAGAZINES 7%	NEWSPAPERS/POSTERS 18%	23%	8%	0.2%

Table VI reveals that Electronic media are the most important source of information regarding H.I.V. and contraception (television 65%; radio 3%) followed by print media (magazines 7%; news papers 18%) and interpersonal communication (friends 23%; teachers 8% and family members (0.2%).

Attitude towards sex education : 96% of the study population thought that sex education was necessary . In the present study, 56% of them felt 15 years was the appropriate age for it and another 13% opined that 12 years is the age at which sex education should be imparted. Regarding benefits of sex education only benefit they could think of was prevention of H.I.V. and other infections but none mentioned about pregnancy prevention, menstrual hygiene.

Knowledge of cancer screening was found to be poor among college girls. Pap smear as a screening test for cervical cancer was known to 13% of the study population and only 2% were aware that breast lump needs evaluation and still less (0.3%) knew of self breast examination.

Regarding Maternal mortality, poverty and malnourishment as causes of maternal deaths were known to 86% and 75% of the students respectively. Another 56 % were aware of haemorrhage as a cause and 35% knew that complications in delivery can lead to maternal death. Delay in transport was picked up as a cause by 32% of them. None knew that hypertension and sepsis can cause maternal mortality.

VI. Discussion

In the present study, regarding diagnosisof pregnancy, among 500 students, one third were aware of urine pregnancy test and equal number knew that pelvic examination can be employed in diagnosis and half of them had knowledge of ultrasound being used as a means of pregnancy diagnosis.This information regarding pregnancy diagnosis is important for young women as it can lead to early diagnosis and proper care in early pregnancy and suitable and safe interventions in case of unwanted pregnancies. In knowledge about the investigations and prescriptions in pregnancy, more than half of them were aware of haemoglobin and blood group and another 36% were aware of iron supplementation in pregnancy. In our country 85% of women suffer from anaemia which is indicated by low level of haemoglobin and it is one of the important causes of maternal morbidity and mortality . Knowledge about iron supplementation for prevention and treatment of anaemia is

essential. Knowledge about these aspects of pregnancy enables young women to maintain proper health standards while planning their pregnancies. Present study revealed that though more than half of the students were aware of normal mode of delivery and operative delivery, their knowledge regarding average weight of the new born baby and causes of infant mortality are poor. Sensitization in these areas is essential as the fetal outcomes could be modified by proper care during pregnancy and special care in high risk cases.

Two thirds of the study population were aware of Condoms as contraceptives and nearly equal number were knowledgeable of female sterilization. Prathibha et al reported similar results in their study (65.2 %) regarding knowledge of contraception, but much lower figure was reported by Acharya et al (1,7) Prathibha et al in their study, reported that only 14.1 % had knowledge of female sterilization and our study revealed higher number of students (54%) knew about female sterilization. P.V. Kotecha et al reported a lower figure than our study, (6) which shows higher level of knowledge in the present study group. Idang et al reported similar findings in their study (64%)(5) Knowledge about contraception is important for young students as many unwanted and unplanned pregnancies can be prevented and dire consequences of unsafe abortions could be avoided.

Present study revealed that 84% have known about H.I.V; which is concurrent with observations of Prathibha et al (89.5%). None were aware of chlamydial infections which are major causes of pelvic inflammatory diseases and tubal occlusions leading to infertility. Regarding symptoms of R.T.Is, in the present study one third knew of itching, boils and pain abdomen as symptoms Prathibha et al in their study reported awareness regarding these symptoms but number of students who knew about these were low. (1) About modes of transmission of S.T.D.s, sexual contact with infected partner was known to 36% followed by usage of unclean cloth during menses was reported by 20% in the present study. Prathibha et al in their study reported these two as the most commonly known methods of transmission among their study group. (16.7% and 8.2%). (1) The effects of S.T.D.s can be devastating in young women as they can cause considerable morbidity; compromise their fertility and can cause ectopic pregnancy. Young women constitute a vulnerable group as adolescence is a period of increased risk-taking and emotional instability and experimentation. In the present study, electronic media emerged as the most important source of information regarding H.I.V. and contraception (television 65%; radio 3%) followed by print media (magazines 7%; news papers 18%) and interpersonal communication (friends 23%; teachers 8% and family members (0.2%). Similar results were reported by Prathibha et al (71.7%) and Kotecha et al. (1,6) These observations show the effectiveness of electronic media as a source of information and poor effect of personal communication. Teacher as a source of information was mentioned by very less number of girls revealing less impact of school education.

Attitude towards sex education : 96% of the study population thought that sex education was necessary. Prathibha et al reported similar (86.4%) observations in their study. (1) in the present study, 56% of them felt 15 years was the appropriate age for it. Regarding benefits of sex education only benefit they could think of was prevention of H.I.V. and other infections but none mentioned about pregnancy prevention, menstrual hygiene. Knowledge of cancer screening was found to be poor and this area needs attention as sensitive screening methods for breast and genital cancers (pap smear, colposcope, mammogram) are available and most of the genital cancers can be cured if detected at an early stage and preventive vaccines are available for cervical cancer.

Economic and social factors like poverty and malnourishment as the causes of maternal mortality were known to two thirds of them and another half were aware that haemorrhage and difficult delivery can cause maternal mortality. This knowledge about causes of maternal mortality is essential as this can motivate the young girls for taking steps to maintain good state of health; to seek advice early in pregnancy and choose a safe place for delivery to avoid complications while they plan for motherhood.

V. Conclusions

Reproductive health should be an integral part of education and objective of this education should be to reduce the adverse outcome from sexual behaviour such as unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, and infections of reproductive tract including H.I.V. The symptoms; modes of transmission and preventive aspects of infections of reproductive tract should be stressed as they can influence their fertility and health. Debates and discussions on causes of maternal and infant mortality may sensitize the girl students and may lead to their active participation in decision making in matters of antenatal care, contraception and child birth. Electronic media play an important role in dissemination of information. Counselors on Reproductive health should be available at every college which should include a specialist on a timely basis.

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