

Impact of Adolescents Awareness on Perception of Sexually Transmitted Infections

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ABSTRACT

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are diseases transmitted by direct contact during sexual intercourse. Because of high incidence and possibility of development severe consequences on general and reproductive health, STIs are a major problem among young people in the world. Lack of information is one of the major risk factors for STI transmission. Most of young people (53.3%) had their first sexual intercourse at the age of 18 years, 67.7% of students have no knowledge about STI, 53.3% of students have already entered into sexual relations and 13% of them with more than 4 partners. 31.1% of students who are sexually active was not examined by a gynecologist because of shame and fear. Most sexually active adolescents did not use contraceptives and they are not satisfied with the available information about STI. There is also continuing problem of teen pregnancy. The main goal of this research is to examine whether there is relationship between level of information and awareness of surveyed adolescents and their perception of sexually transmitted diseases.

Key words: sexually transmitted infections, adolescents, unplanned pregnancy

Introduction

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are diseases transmitted by direct contact during sexual intercourse. STIs are global public health problem due to epidemic spread, many complications they cause and huge treatment cost for health systems and individuals.

According to the World Health Organization there are 250 million annually registered new cases of STIs¹. Because of the high incidence and possibility of development of severe consequences on general and reproductive health, STIs are a major problem among young people in the world^{2,3}. Lack of information is one of the major risk factors for STI transmission so it is necessary to develop integrated prevention methods for STI. Aim and purpose of our study was to investigate sexual behavior, habits and knowledge among adolescents in a small isolated town. The results of our pilot study are extremely disappointing and alarming.

Materials and Methods

The retrospective study included students of, third- and fourth-grade Gymnasium Bernardin Frankopan in years 2013–2014. The study was conducted using anonymous survey. The survey was designed to give a chance to the students to demonstrate their STI knowledge. The questions were related to sexual intercourse engagement, number of partners, reasons for engaging in sexual relations, information availability and doctor visits. In addition to general part of the survey related to answering questions, students had so called 'Visual' part of the questionnaire where they were presented with images of sexually transmitted diseases or non-sexually transmitted diseases. By looking at those images they had to give certain answers (whether it is STI, what feelings it provokes in them, etc.). With that approach we wanted to

present how visual presentation changes perception of STI knowledge.

Results

266 pupils were surveyed, from which 92 were male and 174 were female. Given that today's adolescents get into sexual relations earlier than before it is not surprising that 141 of them (53.00%) entered into a sexual relationship, while 125 (47.00%) younger than 18 years did not have sexual intercourse. Of all surveyed students 110/141 (78.01%) had less than two partners and 31/141 (21.98%) more than four partners. Most common reason for entering into sexual intercourse was love 87/141 (61.70%), followed by curiosity 41/141 (29.07%), physiological need 44/141 (31.20%) and maturity 26/141 (18.43%). Although nowadays sex is no longer a »taboo« topic, it has been shown that a large number of young people did not go to the doctor after starting sexual intercourse 185 (69.53%), while only 84 (31.57%) did. For most common reasons they avoid going to the doctor they state fear 52/185 (28.10%), shame 65/185 (35.13%) and 68/185 (36.75%) felt that they did not need it.

More than half of the students 177 (66.54%) reported that they acquired information about STI via Internet (71.75%), magazines (35.59%), books (31.63%) and discussions with friends (26.55%), doctor (22.59%) and parents (17.67%). Although the information is now more accessible than before, and the students stated that they were informed, it is surprising that as many as 167 students (62.78%) felt they did not know enough about STI. In fact, students lack of information causes in 59.39% of young people fear about the possible transmission of STIs.

On the issue that is causing the fear of STI transmission, 107 (67.72%) students responded that it was the lack of information about STI, 25 (15.82%) frequent partner change and lack of protection as a cause of fear, 34 (11.51%) said they have no fear because they believe their partner.

Looking for way to examine the way in which information influences perception and knowledge of STI, students were offered picture STI and non STI diseases (warts and psoriasis), and we asked them to answer the question if picture shows STI or not, whether it is a dangerous disease and what kind of feelings they experience by looking at these pictures. When viewing pictures of psoriasis (without previous knowledge about disease), 132 (49.62%) said that it is STI, and 134 (50.37%) that it is not STI. On the issue of whether psoriasis is a dangerous disease, 67

(25.52%) responded yes, 43 (16.16%) it isn't, and even 161 (50.53%) did not know. For images with warts, 191 (71.80%) students recognized that it as STI, 117 (43.98%) believe it is a dangerous disease, 32 (12.03%) did not recognize it, and 117 (43.98%) did not know the answer to the question. In 80% of surveyed subjects images causes a feeling of disgust.

Discussion

Sexually transmitted diseases present big problem in today's world. The reason probably lies in the fact that today's society has become more tolerant to the behavior and attitude of individuals and groups.⁴ There are less and less negative opinions and prohibitions that hinder young people and their behavior which makes that tolerance reflect in their sexual life. Age of entry into sexual intercourse every year gets lower. Although most of them replied that they think they know enough about STI by looking at survey data we found the opposite.

Knowledge about their own sexuality and fertility, adolescents usually acquired through unreliable sources such as the Internet, friends and magazines. Most of them, despite available information, fear STI transmission. All the data confirm that there is need for sex education, particularly in schools. In addition, it is necessary to develop preventive programs that should not only be pointed to acquiring knowledge and protection against STIs, but to attitude change and responsible sexual behavior adoption.

Conclusion

Despite available literature, adolescents are not fully satisfied with education in existing health system. Adolescent's health education should be directed not only to increasing their knowledge, but also to support and develop social skills for avoiding risk prone behavior, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy.^{5E} Without systematic introduction of a comprehensive and scientifically based health education in primary and, secondary schools, adequate foreknowledge, interests and needs of young people and intensive work with parents, positive developments in the field of reproductive health will be minimal. Each of us has task to use his influence in society to encourage forming youth center where every adolescent could anonymously come for an exam or only for an advice.

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UTJECAJ ZNANJA UČENIKA NA PERCEPCIJU SPOLNO PRENOSIVIH INFEKCIJA

SAŽETAK

Spolno prenosive infekcije (SPI) su bolesti koje se prenose izravnim kontaktom tijekom spolnog odnosa. Zbog velike učestalosti i mogućnost razvoja teških posljedica na opće i reproduktivno zdravlje, SPI predstavljaju veliki problem među mladima u svijetu. Nedostatak informacija je jedan od glavnih čimbenika rizika za STI prijenosa. Većina mladih (53,3%) je prvi spolni odnos imala u dobi od 18 godina, 67,7% studenata nemaju znanja o STI, 53,3% studenata već ušli u seksualne odnose, a čak 13% njih imalo je spolne odnose sa više od 4 partnera. 31,1% studenata koji su seksualno aktivni nije bilo na pregledu kod ginekologa zbog srama i straha. Većina seksualno aktivnih ispitanika nikada ne koristi kontracepciju te nisu zadovoljni dostupnim informacijama o STI. Tu je i problem maloljetničke trudnoće. Glavni cilj ovog istraživanja bio je ispitati postoji li povezanost između stupnja informiranosti ispitanih adolescenata i njihove percepcije o spolno prenosivim bolestima.