

Ethnic differences in university students' knowledge of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections

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At present, HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) have created a serious public health issue. Youth aged 15 - 24 years are the most vulnerable to infection, the main reason being their lack of knowledge. Youth can be categorized into different sub-groups by ethnicity, religion, education, and gender. Some of these categories may face an increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and STIs. University students comprise a sub-group that is somewhat neglected by researchers on the assumption that they are more knowledgeable because of their academic status. However, they are not a homogeneous group; although they may share an educational level, factors such as ethnicity and religion can influence their knowledge. At present, there is a lack of evidence on the ethnic differentials of knowledge on HIV/AIDS and STIs among university students. Therefore, this study focuses on the ethnic differences among university students' knowledge of HIV/AIDS and STIs. The study, conducted in 2016, selected 210 respondents from the Faculties of Arts, Management, Science, Medicine, and Law in the University of Colombo. Equal numbers were selected with respect to gender and ethnicity (Sinhala, Tamil, and Moor) by using the purposive sampling method. Data were collected by a self-administered questionnaire. Findings indicate that respondents' mean age was 23.5 years. A higher proportions of students came from urban areas. Sinhalese students' knowledge about AIDS was higher than that of Moor students, while Tamil students reported the lowest levels of knowledge. Nearly one fifth of Tamil students had never heard of STIs. Moor students had a better awareness of where STD tests are conducted than the other two groups. The findings suggest that it is important to organize seminars, workshops, and guest lectures to provide adequate knowledge on HIV/AIDS and STIs to university students. It is further suggested that the University introduce reproductive health counselling centres and also make HIV/AIDS and STI related materials available in libraries.

Keywords: *ethnic differences, knowledge, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, university students, youth*