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KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES FOR PREVENTION OF STDS AND EARLY PREGNANCY IN ADOLESCENTS FROM A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN SALVADOR, BAHIA

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to describe the knowledge, attitudes and practices of adolescents in relation to Sexually Transmitted Diseases and adolescent pregnancy prevention. This study enrolled 164 students from a public school in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. An anonymous questionnaire was developed by the authors and used for data collection. Women comprised 59.5% of the study population and the average age was 17 years old. Only 23% and 34% of the students indicated HBV and HTLV as STDs, respectively. HIV was identified as STD by 84.5% of the students, while 68.3% believed that the disease could be transmitted through blood donation. Only 64.6% of the students reported consistent condom use. Hormonal contraceptive methods were identified by students as a preventive method to STD. The students' knowledge about the theme of the study showed to be unsatisfactory. Attitudes and practices of students can contribute to greater exposure to STD.

Keywords: Sexually transmitted diseases; Adolescents; Pregnancy.

INTRODUCTION

Premature sexual initiation by adolescents may lead to unprotected sexual intercourse that may cause HIV infection or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Another risk involved is the possibility of unplanned pregnancy that may lead to mis-

carriage, a matter still poorly discussed in Brazilian society.^(1,2) The present study aims to describe knowledge, attitudes and practices of adolescents in relation to the prevention of STDs and teenage pregnancy in a public school in Salvador.

METHODS

This was the first phase of an educational and preventive study of the Extension Project entitled School within the University from Bahiana School of Medicine and Public Health (EBMSP). This study has investigated the universe of 450 students enrolled at the morning shift of a public high school in Salvador. Most of the students were absent and only 164 have participated in the present study. An anonymous questionnaire was developed by the authors. This instrument consisted of three sections containing questions about socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge about sex education and behavioral aspects related to the subject. Data were analyzed using Epi info 3.5.1 (CDC, 2008). This study protocols were approved by the Ethical Review Board of the Bahiana School of Medicine and Public Health protocol number 023/2011 and are in accordance with Brazilian National Health Council Resolution 196/96, as well as the sixth revision of the Declaration of Helsinki, 2008.

RESULTS

Of the 164 students, 59.5% were women. The mean and median age was 17, ranging from 12 to 21 years. The predominant religion was Catholic (43.3%) followed by the Evangelical (26.8%). The internet use was the preferred way of communication used by students to acquire information on the subject (70.2%).

Most of the students (76.2%) qualified their knowledge about STDs as good or excellent. Only 23% and 34% of students recognized HBV and HTLV as STDs. The frequency of HPV recognition as STD was 56.7%. With respect to HIV, the majority 68.3% believed that the disease could be transmitted through blood donation. The use of public toilet (25%), mosquito bites (9.8%) and contact with intact skin (7.9%) were also reported by students as a means of HIV transmission. Some students (9.8%) did not know the risk of HIV transmission through the sharing of contaminated syringes.

Most of the students that reported sexual activity had their first experience between 14 and 17 years (40.8%) and 49.4% out of these had a steady partner. Only 64.6% of students reported frequent use of condoms. The failure to the use of condoms after the first sexual activity with a regular partner was reported by 21.4%. The male condom (62.8%) was the preferred contraceptive method, followed by the pill (29.9%), "the morning-after pill" (17.7%) and contraceptive injections (11.0%). The

frequencies of reasons explaining the abstention of the use of male condoms were: loss of sensation and pleasure (54.2%), carelessness (22.6%), to consider that the use of condoms is not necessary when choosing the right partner or having a relationship of affection (19.3%). With regard to the knowledge about oral sex, 17% reported doubt if it was possible to get pregnant through oral sex. Table 1 depicts the methods mentioned by students to prevent pregnancy and to prevent both pregnancy and STD.

Table 1 – Percentage and numerical distribution of students according to their knowledge about methods for preventing pregnancy and SDT. Salvador (BA), 2011

Methods	Contraception		Contraception and prevention of SDT
	N	%	%
Male condom	148	90.2	92.7
Pill	126	76.8	30.5
Morning-after pill	110	67.0	23.1
Contraceptive injections	91	55.5	13.4
IUD	71	43.3	13.4
Rhythm	22	13.4	9.1
Spermicide	17	10.3	3.0

DISCUSSION

Literature reports significant influence of religion on individuals' behavior, especially regarding sexuality.⁽³⁾ However, the present study has not found significant correlations. The increasing use of the internet by adolescents reported in literature as the preferred way to acquire information was confirmed in this study.

Although most students have qualified their knowledge about STDs as good or excellent, the results of the present study showed the opposite. With respect to HIV transmission, some students reported as risk factors the use of public toilet, mosquito bite, blood donation and skin contact, as reported in previous studies,^(2, 4) and some students did not recognize the risk of HIV transmission through the sharing of contaminated syringes.

Many students have identified contraceptive methods such as contraceptive pill, "morning-after pill", contraceptive injections, among others, as STD prevention methods. The present study has identified a major concern of students in preventing an unplanned pregnancy in relation to sexually transmitted diseases. These results are supported by the literature that reports the failure to use condoms when oral contraceptive was used by students⁽⁵⁾. Some students revealed doubts about the possibility of getting pregnant with oral sex. These results show the necessity of educational in-

stitutions efforts on the learning teaching process concerning issues related to sexual and reproductive health, including human anatomy and physiology.

Corroborating with literature,^(4, 5, 6, 7) among those who had initiated their sexual activity, most of them reported the use of male condom as the preferred contraception method. It is noteworthy that the effective use of the male condom method depends on many variables such as gender, socioeconomic status, the knowledge about STDs transmission, adolescent own opinion or the partner opinion, among others.^(4, 6) The favorable attitude to the effective use condoms by adolescents depends essentially on the physical and emotional aspects involved, as well as the awareness of the importance of use not only to prevent pregnancy, but also to prevent SDT. In the present study, some students mentioned the decrease of sensitivity and pleasure, carelessness, or having a relationship of affection as relevant factors for avoiding the use of condoms.

CONCLUSION

The students' knowledge about the prevention of STD and early pregnancy showed to be unsatisfactory. Attitudes and practices of students can contribute to greater exposure to STDs. Public school must provide better information about the studied theme. The Extension Activities by Higher Education institutions can actively participate in the health education of adolescent students from public schools.

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