

■ *Original Article*

## Knowledge and attitude on sexual behaviour among school adolescents

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### Abstract

**Background:** Most of the adolescents of remote areas of Nepal lack the basic knowledge about sex due to which they are suffering from various sex related problems. **Objective:** To identify the level of knowledge and attitude about sex, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) especially HIV/AIDS and their prevention in adolescents. **Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted in various secondary schools of Dhankuta district involving 200 adolescent students aged between 13 to 19 years. Collected data was entered in Microsoft Excel and analysed. **Results:** Regarding safe sex, most of the students (26%) believe that safe sex is having sex with single partner only and about 13% percent of them had no idea about safe sex. Most of them (94%) think that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted from one person to another person from unsafe sexual contact. Most of the students (93%) believe that avoiding sex with multiple partners could prevent from getting HIV/AIDS. **Conclusion:** The perception about sexually transmitted diseases varies among school students. Some still had misconception regarding the route and cause of transmission of STI.

**Keywords:** knowledge, attitude, sexual behaviour, school adolescents

### Introduction

Sex education is the process of acquiring information and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity, relationships and intimacy.<sup>1</sup> It is also about developing young people's skills so that they can make informed choices about their behavior and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices.<sup>2</sup>

With increasing prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, sex education is of prime importance in the adolescents of today. Young people often lack the knowledge related to health issues such as STIs, HIV/AIDS. They also lack maturity to face grave consequences after getting infected with STIs. Adolescent comprises of 20% of the total world population and 80% of them live in developing

countries. Despite high chances of indulging into sexual activity, adolescent especially in developing countries often lack due knowledge about the human body and reproduction.<sup>3</sup>

Teenage sexual activity and pregnancy has emerged as a major social problem in Nepal where more than 60 percent of its total population live under poverty line. Poverty, illiteracy and lack of awareness are some of the root causes for various types of psychosocial crimes like sex abuse, rape, unwanted pregnancies, illegal abortions, suicides, commercial prostitution, and human trafficking etc.<sup>4</sup>

Lack of proper sex education, practices of unsafe sexual activities, poor knowledge about ovulation, menstrual cycle and conception among female partners and lack of awareness about STIs and HIV/AIDS have contributed a lot in increasing the number of teenage pregnancy and rise in fertility rate, population and poverty in the country. It has also become a major factor in pushing our young generation into the danger of HIV/AIDS progressively.<sup>5</sup>

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HIV/AIDS has emerged as the single most formidable challenge to public health, human rights and development in the new millennium. UNAIDS estimates 38 million people across the world are living with HIV/AIDS and 61000 of these people are living in Nepal.<sup>6</sup> In Kathmandu Valley, an estimate of HIV cases is about 8000 (6000-8000), the main groups being IV drug user (IDU) and client of Female Sex Workers (FSWs).<sup>7</sup>

This study was designed to identify the level of knowledge and attitude about sex, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) especially HIV/AIDS and their prevention in adolescents.

### Operational definitions

**Reproductive health:** It is a state in which people have the ability to reproduce and regulate their fertility and are able to go through pregnancy and child birth safely. Hence the outcome of pregnancy is successful and the couples are able to have sexual relations free of the fear of pregnancy and contracting disease.<sup>3</sup>

**Knowledge about reproductive health:** This term refers to an awareness of high school adolescent about reproductive health that has been measured by the knowledge part of research instrument designed for this study purpose.<sup>3</sup>

**Attitude towards reproductive health:** This term refers to the opinion about reproductive health given by school adolescent which includes pubertal changes, reproduction, sexuality, safe sexual practices, family planning and STDs and HIV-AIDS.<sup>3</sup>

### Methods

This cross sectional study was conducted from 23<sup>rd</sup> May to 4<sup>th</sup> June 2010 in Dhankuta District where 200 adolescents from 13-19 years age group were used as subjects. They were selected from three schools (Hile Secondary School, a public school and Nilgiri Don Bosco English Boarding School and Mother Land Secondary English Boarding School). Written permission was taken from each schools head and verbal consents were taken from each student.

Convenient purposive sampling technique was applied. After that the students were separated into male and female and four groups were put into separate classes with one student in one bench. The questionnaires were distributed to each individual whose identity was kept confidential. Those not understanding the questions and their options were explained individually. After completing the answer the questionnaires were collected in a box.

Collected data was coded and entered in Microsoft XL and analyzed by using SPSS, percentage, proportion and test of significance was applied wherever applicable.

### Results

**Table 1: Preference regarding sexual intercourse before marriage (n=200)**

Characteristics	Percentage
Yes	16.0
No	74.0
No response	10.0
Total	100.0

This table shows that, most of the students (74%) do not prefer to have sexual intercourse before marriage; however, some students (16%) prefer premarital sex.

**Table 2: Knowledge regarding safe sex (n=200)**

Knowledge	Percentage
Sex with single partner	26.0%
Sexual intercourse after appropriate age	22.5%
Using condoms	13.5%
All of the above	25.0%
No idea	13.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

About one fourth of the students (26%) believe that safe sex is having sex with single partner only, and 13% have no idea about safe sex. 25% were aware of all three conditions related to safe sex.

**Table 3: Knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS transmission**

Mode of transmission	YES (%)	NO (%)	Don't Know (%)
Unsafe sexual contact can transmit	94.0	3.0	3.0
Mosquito bite can transmit	24.0	66.0	10.0
Mother to child transmission	93.0	5.0	3.0
Blood transfusion	87.0	6.0	7.0
Shaking hands	9.0	83.0	8.0
Shaving razors of HIV infected individual	46.0	33.0	25.0
Social kissing with HIV infected individual	11.0	70.0	19.0
Sharing infected needle	66.0	17.0	17.0

\*Percentages are based on multiple responses

Majority of them (94%) think that HIV/AIDs can be transmitted from one person to another person from unsafe sexual contact. Some believe that even mosquito bite (24%) and social kissing (11%) can transmit HIV infection.

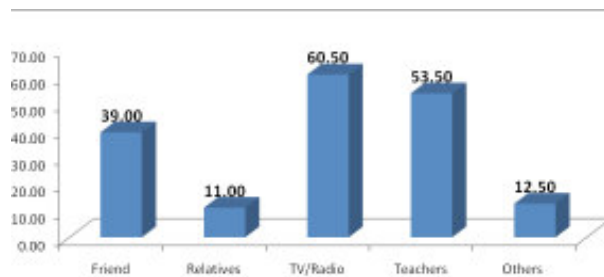
**Table 4: Knowledge on preventive measures of HIV/AIDS**

Preventive measures	YES (%)	NO (%)	Don't Know (%)
Avoiding sex with multiple partners	93.0	4.0	3.0
Using condoms during intercourse	88.0	9.0	3.0
Using mosquito net at sleeping	35.0	52.0	13.0
Avoid sharing same dish with person HIV/AIDS	26.0	60.0	14.0
Using sterilized disposable needles	82.0	6.0	12.0

\*Percentages are based on multiple responses

Ninety three percent of the students believe that avoiding sex with multiple partners prevents from getting HIV/AIDS. On the other hand some believe that even using mosquito net (35%) and avoiding sharing same dish with person having HIV/AIDS (26%) prevents from getting HIV/AIDS.

**Fig 1: Source of Knowledge regarding safe sex**



\*Percentages are based on multiple responses

The figure indicates that sources of information of most of the students get knowledge about sex are TV/radio and teachers.

### Discussion

Owing to sociocultural taboos and inhibitions sexual health research in Nepal remains restricted to a small number of studies pertinent for young people, especially those who are unmarried. Further, much of the hitherto limited research with young people remains unpublished.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of a global decline in age of sexual maturation and rising age of marriage, the window of opportunity for young people to engage in premarital sexual relations is opening. Social taboos and inhibitions have in the past limited the study of Nepalese young people's sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour; however, with the advent of HIV/AIDS and increasing prevalence of STIs there has been a realization of the need to provide young people with information and skills to reduce their vulnerability to negative sexual health outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

This study shows that most of the students (74%) don't want to have sex before marriage, however, some students (16%) want but respondents' attitudes toward premarital sex were for the most part,

moderate as seen in an Iranian study, despite the socio-cultural difference between the two countries. Indeed, between (15%) and (27%) disagreed with prohibitions against premarital sex and (13%) were tolerant of homosexual behavior.<sup>9</sup> similarly same finding was observed as study where (16%) of respondents prefer sex before marriage.

Findings from other studies which have investigated premarital sexual behavior among high school and college students have shown the rates of activity to vary from 11% in Pokhara to 14% to in Kathmandu and 16% in Palpa District.<sup>8</sup>

In the present study, majority (26%) thought that safe sex is sex with single partner. They supported the sexual intercourse after appropriate age (22.5%) and use of condoms (13.5%).

Most of the students (94%) in our study knew that HIV/AIDS is transmitted due to unsafe sexual contact, 93% had knowledge about the transmission of HIV from infected mother to child. Mode of transmission through blood transfusion and sharing of infected needle was known to 87% and 66% of the participants respectively. The study conducted by Jaiswal et al, also showed similar population i.e.96.4% which considered unsafe sexual contact as the mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS.. The same study showed that 91.8% have knowledge about mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS - a finding similar to ours.. Transmission by blood transfusion (92.4%) and sharing of needle (66%) were also considered by the participants in the study by Jaiswal et al, however the number of subjects supporting this differed from our study.<sup>10</sup>

In our study, most of the students (93.0%) believed that avoiding sex with multiple partners and using condoms (88.0%) can prevent the acquisition of HIV/AIDS. Number of students with this knowledge regarding the prevention of HIV/AIDS is different as compared to the report of the similar studies by Jaiswal et al, in Kathmandu valley and Lakhey et al in Eastern Nepal. ( . In the study by Jaiswal 90.2% were of view that sex with single partner can prevent the transmission whereas 92.6 % thought that use of condoms can reduce the transmission.. Lakhey et al, in their study found that students believed that sex with single partner(27.6%) and condom use ( 73.3%<sup>11</sup> can prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Most of the students in our study were found to get knowledge about sex from TV/ radio and teachers. In the study conducted by Mohammadi et al in Tehran Iran for information on sexual matters, the pattern was even more skewed. When asked to name their most important source of information and their preferred source of information on sex, respondents most often cited peers (34% and 21%, respectively) or teachers (21% and 15%, respectively). Relatively few adolescents (16% and 12% respectively) cited their parents as their most important source of information and their preferred source of information on sex.<sup>12</sup>

About one-fifth of young people surveyed for a recent National Youth Organization report shared that they visited pornographic sites when they accessed to Internet.<sup>13</sup> Use of chat rooms was far more common, reported by nearly half of the Internet users in the study, which was not reported in our study.

### Conclusion

The study reflects variable perceptions about sexually transmitted diseases among school students. Some still had misconception in its cause and routes of transmission. We advocate dissemination of scientific knowledge related to sexually transmitted diseases among the school students.

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