



## HIV/AIDS AWARENESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper an attempt has been made to study HIV/AIDS awareness among university students. To achieve this purpose survey method under the descriptive method of research was used. All the students of Himachal Pradesh University constituted the population of the study. To conduct this study a sample 146 students were selected randomly from the department. Keeping in view the nature of the study the investigator used the tool, "HIV/AIDS Awareness Test", developed and standardized by Singh (2012). The reliability of this tool is 0.89. Since the data from the HIV/AIDS Awareness test was available in the form of scores, so as to find out the significance of difference between the various groups 't'-test was applied. The findings of the study revealed that gender wise, locality wise, and stream wise, students do not differ significantly in their awareness related to HIV/AIDS.*

**Keywords:** HIV Positive, Awareness, Prevention and Blood Transmission.



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### **Introduction**

India has the third largest number of HIV cases worldwide, with an estimated 21 lakh people living with HIV. Of these, around 15 lakh have been diagnosed and 10 lakh are on ART. According to a Lancet study, 1.96 lakh new cases emerged in 2015, and the number of people who died of AIDS-related complications is 1.3 lakh. World AIDS Day (2016) brought a mixed bag for India's HIV Positive community as there's cheer that the country has managed to put a million infected on anti-retroviral treatment (ART) but worries mount over an important legislation that borders on the ambiguous with regard to the government's commitment to tackle the deadly disease. The majority of new HIV infections occur among young women and adolescent girls. The issues faced by this demographic population include gender-based violence (including sexual abuse) and a lack of access to education, health services, social protection and information about how they cope with these inequities and injustices. The student community got chance to understand the negative impacts HIV related

stigma towards fellow students infected and affected with HIV/AIDS as well as how they could improve and become change agents in supporting these fellow young people to live longer. Many youth are socially inexperienced and dependent on others. HIV affects the immune system and reduces the body's defenses to protect against various infectious diseases. HIV prevalence continues to be high among vulnerable groups. Physical, psychological, and social attributes of university students make them particularly vulnerable to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Societies often compound young people's risk by making it difficult for them to learn about HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. As compared to the developed countries, students/adolescents in India are less aware about the reproductive health education. Hence this study was conducted with the purpose to evaluate awareness level of students of Himachal Pradesh University.

### **Status of HIV/AIDS in Himachal Pradesh**

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS "acquired immunodeficiency syndrome" has become one of the world's most serious health and development challenges. The first cases were reported in 1981 and today there are approximately 35 million people currently living with HIV and tens of millions of people have died of AIDS-related causes since the beginning of the epidemic. HIV not only affects the health of the individuals, its impact should hold, communities, the development and economic growth of nations. National AIDS Control Programme (NACO) in India has been rests on two key pillars – prevention for those who are not infected and care, support and treatment for those who have been infected. According to the State AIDS Control Society in Himachal Pradesh there are 6841 persons tested positive for the deadly virus. The largest district of Kangra has the highest number of HIV positive and AIDS cases. However the least populated Lahaul and Spiti has recorded no HIV cases and is AIDS free so far. Kangra so far recorded as many as 1815 HIV Positive cases followed by Hamirpur with 1,387 cases, Shimla 755, Bilaspur-537, Una 681, Mandi-519, Solan-326, Chamba-130, Kullu-115, Sirmour-89 and Kinnaur-15. Among them were about 112 Non-Himachali HIV positive patients. Kangra district also had the highest 639 AIDS patients followed by the hamirpur-512, Mandi-235, Una-209, Bilaspur-206, Solan-102, Shimla-65, Chamba-41, Kullu-18, Sirmour-13 and Kinnaur just one. There are 24 non Himachali AIDS patients living in the state. The figure shows that spread from infection has reduce by 50 percent between 2000-2009. Dr. Dogra said that 83147 people come voluntarily for the HIV test. According to the World Health Organization norms, HIV positive patients converted into AIDS cases when the number of CD-4 cell in the human body come down drastically from

1500 to 350. The problem of the HIV or AIDS started in India with the detection of the first case among commercial sex workers in Chennai in 1986.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The thorough review of related research in conducting a good piece of research is very important. In this paper an attempt was made by the investigator to look at the studies conducted in India and abroad. Okeke and Fortune (1992) revealed that although most students knew that HIV could be transmitted through vaginal, anal sex, blood transmission and by sharing needles with HIV infected drug users. Yet only few students knew that HIV cannot be transmitted by sharing clothing, sneezing and coughing, sharing of drinking glasses, shaking of hands, hugging, kissing and from swimming pools. Akande (1994) found no significant difference by gender of students in their overall knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Oladepo and Brieger (1994) found that 90.6% of their sampled participants were familiar with the term AIDS and that 58.7% of the sampled population knew that AIDS was caused by a virus. However, majority of them believed that AIDS could spread from shaking of hands. Aggarwal and Kumar (1996) found that 85% of students had heard of AIDS; of these, 56% cited sex with an infected partner as a means of HIV transmission and 38% identified use of unsterilized drug-injecting equipment. 23% of students believed that HIV can be transmitted by drinking from a glass used by an infected person while 22% thought mosquito bites spread the virus. 57% believed persons with AIDS can be detected by their physical appearance and 38% considered to be a treatable disease. Baggaleys et al. (1997) found that students were quite knowledgeable about transmission of HIV through semen, blood and vaginal fluid. However, 50% of them believed that saliva transmits HIV. Zulkifli and Wong (2002) found that the locality wise average score of the persons for knowledge on HIV/AIDS was high. However, misconceptions regarding transmission were prevailed. Deb, Mukherjee and Acharya (2004) observed that 100% of students have heard of HIV/AIDS, a good number of them had some misconceptions with regard to various aspects of the disease. Gupta et al. (2004) observed that adolescents ages 10-19 years, of which 43.2% were girls revealed that only 35% of the girls were aware of the existence of AIDS, only 17.1% were aware of at least one method of contraception and 21.5% of girls in their late teens (15-19 years) were aware of any sexually transmitted infections. Oladokun, Jiboye and Akinyemi (2009) found that 92.6% students had a good knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Unnikrishnan, Mithra and Reshmi (2010) revealed that one-third of the respondents thought that one could get infected by merely touching an HIV positive individual. Approximately 45% stated that

they would dismiss their maid on finding out her HIV positive status. About 54% were willing to undergo the HIV test. Bekalu and Eggermont (2013) found that the knowledge gaps between individuals with high and low education and between individuals who experience high and low levels of interpersonal communication about HIV/AIDS narrowed as HIV/AIDS-related media use increased, but the gap between urban and rural residents widened. Gupta, Verma, Tripathi, Gupta and Panday (2014) reviewed that the knowledge about modes of prevention (blood checkup, needle/syringe sterilization) was satisfactory. There were misconceptions about the modes of transmission the disease, such as through mosquito bites, eating/drinking and kissing. Shinde et. al (2016) found that awareness regarding mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS was found expressed as unprotected sex by 85.94% students. Awareness regarding prevention of HIV/ AIDS, 70.70% students believes condoms as a best means of protection against HIV followed by safe blood (43.75%), disposable syringes (40.23%). Patil and Bhovi (2016) found awareness among students about HIV was good. All the students (100%) were conscious about HIV/AIDS disease, its causative agent and diagnostics test. Majority of the students were aware about the modes of transmission and preventive approaches. Very few misconceptions were observed like spread by mosquito bite. Jain and Mittal (2016) found that majority were having awareness and knowledge about HIV/AIDS regarding general issues, mode of transmission, preventive measures and source of knowledge. Both boys and girls were having positive attitude towards infected person. Vasant et. al (2016) reported that 100% students were aware about HIV/AIDS. TV was the main source of information. Male students were found to have better knowledge regarding transmission and prevention of AIDS than female students. Decrease in misconceptions and an increase in knowledge occurred about various modes of transmission of HIV& its prevention. Dehghani (2017) indicated, 55% of the participants were male, and the majority of them were about 17-18 years old. The participants' general knowledge about HIV was found to be at moderate level. However, they had insufficient awareness of the associated transmission routes and major causes of this disease. The students majoring in biological sciences were more aware of this issue than other students. In addition, the majority of the students had highly positive attitudes towards the AIDS patients and confirmed their right to live and use all facilities. However, a large proportion of the students denied sharing a location or personal items with these patients.

### **Rationale of the Study**

In fact, one of the largest at-risk populations for HIV/ AIDS is college students. We don't see people dying from AIDS like we used to, so it's not on a lot of people's minds." said Kestin Page, president of the Weber State University Gender and Sexuality Alliance. "But at the same time, HIV is still spreading. And among the more vulnerable groups are 18- to 24-year-olds, which I would attribute to a lack of education as far as sexual health and health care practices go." With the absence of proper education, this serious virus has made its way back under the skin of a population that also is plagued by ignorance of the issue. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has become a human, social and economic disaster, with far-reaching implications for individuals, communities and countries. No other disease has so dramatically highlighted the current disparities and inequities in health-care access, economic opportunity and the protection of basic human rights. Three decades have gone by and humanity is struggling to find ways to face challenges posed by a little known virus called HIV. One may say that this ignorance was partly due to lack of adequate and reliable information and was partly rooted in human self-belief that worst can never strike him. Hence to study awareness regarding HIV/AIDS among university students is very relevant. The review of related literature also reveals that the studies of this nature are very rare, therefore the proposed study is very much needed and is quite justified.

**Objectives:** The following objectives were achieved in the study:

- To study the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among university students in relation to their gender.
- To study the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among university students in relation to their locale.
- To study the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among university students in relation to their stream (arts & science) of study.

**Hypothesis:** The following research hypotheses were tested in the present study.

- There exists no significant difference in the awareness level of HIV/AIDS among university students in relation to their gender.
- There exists no significant difference in the awareness level of HIV/AIDS among university students in relation to their locale.
- There exists no significant difference in the awareness level of HIV/AIDS among university students in relation to their stream (arts & science) of study.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The proposed study is delimited in terms of:

- The whole sample was taken from Himachal Pradesh University campus only.
- The study was further delimited to the students studying in PG Courses (1<sup>st</sup> Semester).

### **Methodology**

In the present study survey method under the descriptive method of research was used in present study. All the university students of Himachal Pradesh University constituted the population of the study. It included the students (boys and girls) studying in all PG courses. For the present study sampling was done at two stages. At the first stage 14 Department were selected randomly. In the second stage 146 students were selected randomly from the each selected department. Keeping in view the nature of the present study the investigator used the tool, “HIV/AIDS Awareness Test”, developed and standardized by Singh (2012). This tool contains 45 items and the reliability of the tool is 0.89. To collect the related data, investigator personally visited the sampled department and students. The researcher personally administered the HIV/AIDS awareness test to each individual and collected the required information about the present study. The information was tabulated in a systematic manner to arrive at certain conclusions for the study. Since the data from the HIV/AIDS Awareness test was available in the form of scores, so as to find out the significance of difference between the various groups ‘t’-test was applied.

### **Analysis of Data**

The analysis of data is presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Comparison of HIV/AIDS Awareness among Male vs Female, Rural vs Urban and Arts vs Science University Students**

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	‘t’
Gender	Male	73	36.29	5.21	144	1.560*
	Female	73	35.01	4.65		
Locale	Rural	62	33.23	4.78	144	1.472*
	Urban	84	34.39	4.61		
Stream of Study	Arts	69	33.69	4.32	144	1.375*
	Science	77	34.72	4.73		

\* The mean difference is not significant at .05 Level

Table 1 indicates that 't' value (1.560) is not significant at .05 level of significance. It means that awareness level of male and female do not differ significantly towards HIV/AIDS. From the table 1, it may be concluded that male and female have possessed almost equal level of awareness about HIV/AIDS. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. Table 1 further shows that 't' value (1.472) is not significant at .05 level of significance. It means that there exists no significant difference in the awareness of rural and urban university students towards HIV/AIDS related issues. From this it may be concluded that urban as well as rural students possesses almost equal level of awareness about HIV/AIDS. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. Table 1 also shows that 't' value (1.375) is not significant at .05 level of significance. Therefore arts and science students do not differ significantly in their awareness related to HIV/AIDS. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

### **Findings**

The major findings were drawn from the study:

- Male and female university students do not differed significantly in their awareness about HIV/AIDS.
- Rural and urban university students do not differ significantly in their awareness about HIV/AIDS.
- University students of arts and science stream do not differ significantly in their awareness about HIV/AIDS.

### **Educational Implications**

Some of the important educational implications of the present study are: Gender-wise, locality-wise, and stream of study wise students do not differ significantly. From this it may concluded that all the groups possesses almost equal level of awareness about HIV/AIDS. The equal level of awareness may be attributed to the fact that HIV/AIDS related topics/issues are included in their curriculum. Further educational institutions made students more aware and sensitive about this deadly disease through different awareness campaign and programmes. Another reason for the higher proportion of true answers in all the groups may be due the reason that with the changing time, they feel free to talk about sex and HIV/AIDS related issues more openly. It may be due to the reason that nowadays urban as well as rural students are equally exposed to mass media, interpersonal communication, have access to various types of study material etc. related to this epidemic. This indicates that mass media especially television, radio have played important role in raising AIDS awareness within the rural community also. More and more information regarding HIV/AIDS should be provided

to the students irrespective of gender to facilitate and strengthen their awareness about HIV/AIDS and related issues. The different government educational agencies like, UGC, NCERT, NIEPA, NCTE, WHO, NACO should organize different activities and programmes to sensitize them towards this epidemic. Frequent awareness campaigns are required to strengthen and facilitate the right attitude and awareness of the students and common people. It is suggested that more opportunities should be provided to all students to attend and participate in various programmes on HIV/AIDS organized by local Health Department, University, UGC, NCTE, and SCERT. Government and similar organizations should take steps to increase awareness among the adolescent students in the rural areas and remove existing misconceptions regarding the transmission of HIV/ AIDS. IEC activities can be carried out to eradicate misconceptions and improve the knowledge about HIV.

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