

The Diversity of Knowledge Regarding Sexually Transmitted Infections by Study Area: A Case Study Based on University Students

Karunarathne, H. V. V. M. P
Department of Demography
Faculty of Arts
University of Colombo
migarakarunarathne@gmail.com

Introduction

Spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is prominent among the global health issues. Daily, more than one million people get STIs and 500 million people get STIs annually (WHO, 2013). Ninety five per cent of STI patients including HIV are reported from Asian countries and the majority of newly identified patients are reported from countries in South Asia (Rathnayaka, 2002). This indicates a warning to countries like Sri Lanka situated in the South Asian region. According to the WHO (2005), the most vulnerable group with regard to STIs is the youth aged 15 to 24 years. This high vulnerability of youth is due to lack of awareness and negative attitudes towards STIs (ලියනගේ, 2015).

However, youth are not a homogeneous group. They differ by ethnicity, religion, education, gender and many others. Some of these differences may increase risk behavior for STIs. However, university students are a sub-group of youth who get less attention from researchers in comparison to other youth because they are considered more knowledgeable and aware purely due to their academic status. As mentioned by the WHO (2005) level of education will directly affect on knowledge regarding STIs. Though university students' level of education is equal, they differ by the study area, i.e. Arts, Law, Medicine and etc. Therefore, it can be fairly assumed that, university students' knowledge regarding STIs will differ by their study areas and it will create different risk factors for contracting STIs among students. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the diversity of knowledge regarding STIs among university students by their study areas.

Methods and Materials

This study was done in 2016 and the sample for this study was select from the faculties of Arts, Law, Management, Medicine and Science at the University of Colombo. The main reason for selecting the sample from the University of Colombo is that, university has the well-defined faculties in different study areas and it helps to identify the inequalities of undergraduates' knowledge about STIs.

As mentioned in the University of Colombo Annual Report 2010, the entire university student population was 7639. From the entire population 2 per cent were selected as the sample size which amounted to 210. These 210 respondents were selected in equal proportions according to gender and faculties using purposive sampling method.

The main data collection method was a self-administrated questionnaire. In addition, international and national level reports, books, newspapers and magazines related to the

research area and related websites have been used as secondary data. The collected data was analyzed by using univariate and bivariate statistical techniques through SPSS and EXCEL softwares.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of the Respondents

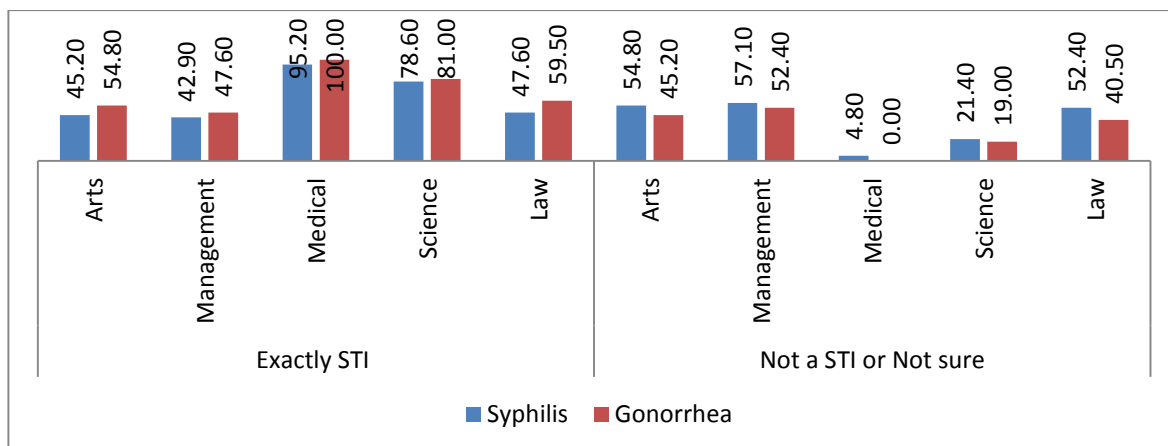
All the respondents are aged between 20 – 29 years with a mean age of 23.5 years. Majority (95.7%) were unmarried. Higher proportions of respondents (50.5%) were from urban areas followed by 47.6 per cent from rural areas. Majority were from Colombo district. While in university, 65.7 per cent of the respondents were residing in university hostels and private boarding places. More than 40 per cent of respondent's monthly household income was above Rs. 40,000 and 48.1 per cent of respondents used Mahapola or Bursary for their academic expenses.

Respondents' Knowledge Regarding STIs

When studying the respondent's knowledge about STIs, each and every faculty have showed that more than 70 per cent of respondents have heard about STIs. This can be seen as a positive sign. Among the faculties, lowest proportion who had heard about STIs was found in the Arts faculty (71.4%), followed by Management and Law (88.1% each) faculties. Highest proportion who had heard about STIs was from the medical faculty.

Although majority of respondents have heard about STIs, the knowledge that they have regarding the clinical names of STIs can be differ by faculties. Results show that although most students identified STIs in a generic form, identification of STIs by clinical name is relatively low among most of students (Figure 1). Syphilis and Gonorrhea are the main STIs commonly found in Sri Lanka (Family Health Bureau, 2014; NSACP, 2015). The highest proportion of correctly identifying both STIs was found in the Medical faculty. This is due to their academic relevance to the area. The lowest knowledge regarding clinical names of STIs was shown by Management faculty students as they either did not know the clinical name or were not sure whether it was an STI.

Figure 1 – Percentage Distribution of Students by Identification of STIs Through Clinical Names (Syphilis and Gonorrhea)



Source – Sample data - 2016

Compared with the Arts faculty students, Law faculty students had a quite good knowledge regarding clinical names of STIs. The main reason for having this kind of result would be due to the effect of study area to the knowledge regarding STIs. Faculties of Arts and Law also showed a relative lack of knowledge about clinical names. However, only one fifth of students in the Science faculty did not know of clinical names.

When it came to the knowledge regarding symptoms of STIs, most of the symptoms were correctly identified by Medical faculty students, followed by Management faculty students. As a negative point, except Medical faculty more than 40 per in the other four faculties have mentioned that they were not aware about STIs symptoms. Some STIs do not have visible symptoms. This was not identified by most of the Arts, Law, Management and Science students. Even among the Medical students, only 33.3 per cent noted that some STIs do not have symptoms. This situation can justify by the statement of the Family Health Bureau (2014) which says that, most people in the general society do not know that some STIs do not have any symptoms. This situation could increase the vulnerability for contracting and spread of STIs among university students.

When considering the knowledge regarding the places that one should go for STI checkups, more than 50 per cent of every faculty have mentioned that, government or private hospitals. However, 71.4 per cent of Medical students have specifically mentioned STD/HIV clinics, whereas noting STD clinics specifically by other faculty students is below 40 per cent. As a negative point, 23.8 per cent each from Arts and Management faculties stated that, they were not aware about places that they should go for STI checkups. The main reason for this could be that the main focus of Management and Arts faculty students respectively are accounting and banking and social and human sciences. Therefore, their knowledge regarding biological factors could be relatively low. According to the above analyzed data this study can emphasize that study area can affect for the variability of knowledge regarding STIs among university students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summation, knowledge regarding STIs differed by study area, and in-depth knowledge regarding STIs was relatively low among most faculties. In comparison to Medical faculty the knowledge in all aspects studied were low among Arts, Management and Law faculties. It can be concluded that, study area affects the diversity of knowledge regarding STIs. Therefore, this study suggests, organizing faculty based panel discussions with qualified doctors and organizing annual compulsory lectures on reproductive health for students. Reproductive health counseling centers should be introduced for university students. It is also suggested to locate a specific area in the university libraries with books related to reproductive health so that students will have easy access.

Key Words: Knowledge; Study Stream; Sexually Transmitted Infections; University Students

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