

**A STUDY OF KNOWLEDGE BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES REGARDING AIDS AND HUMAN SEXUALITY AMONG MEDICAL COLLEGE, ENGINEERING COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES OF GORAKHPUR.**

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**ABSTRACT:**

**Research Problem:** i) What is the level of knowledge and attitude of undergraduates about AIDS and human sexuality?  
ii) What are the preferred modes of obtaining such knowledge?.

**Objectives:** To assess the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of undergraduate students regarding AIDS and human sexuality.

**Study Design:** Self administered questionnaire.

**Setting and Participants:** 1289 undergraduates from B.R.D. Medical College., M. M. M. Engineering College and University of Gorakhpur.

**Study Variables:** Knowledge, beliefs and attitudes regarding AIDS and sexuality.

**Outcome Variables:** Proportion of students having correct knowledge and positive attitudes.

**Statistical Analysis:** By proportions.

**Result:** Level of knowledge about AIDS was generally high. Most of the students obtained knowledge about it through mass media. Few students had misconceptions about transmission of HIV infection. Knowledge about sex was obtained mainly from friends (36%) and books (31.31%). Most of the students preferred doctors (44.15%) and friends (43.66%) for asking something about sex, and not their parents (4.37%) or teachers (4.61%). 59.13% of boys and 34.49% of girls thought that students of their age had sex.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** The most peculiar fact in this study is that students have no reliable means of obtaining correct information about subjects related to sex. Medical profession contributed very little in providing such knowledge. Most of them relied on their friends for such information. So, emphasis is to be given on recommending proper education material for the youth.

**Key Words:** AIDS / HIV, Sex, Knowledge, Attitudes, Undergraduate students.

**INTRODUCTION:**

In many developing countries half of the population is below the age of 25 years, and young people are both - an important target group and a

potential resource for the prevention of HIV.<sup>1</sup>

Education system should fully inform young people about HIV infection, transmission and mean of prevention and help them to develop the skills to act on their knowledge and communicate it to others. Specifically designed programs must help them to maintain healthy behavior and change or avoid behavior that puts them or others at risk.<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of a cure for AIDS or a vaccine for HIV infection and in view of the increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases among youth, education is critical in reducing the transmission of both. Such education needs to be given to young people before they have their first sexual experience, so that they can protect themselves and others from infection. To do this, they need not only appropriate knowledge, but also skills and attitudes that permit effective communication, responsible decision making and development of healthy human relationships.<sup>1</sup>

India is experiencing a rapid and extensive spread of HIV. This is particularly worrisome since India has more people than the continents of Africa, Australia and Latin America combined. There are estimated 2 - 5 million people infected with HIV; and 50,000 to 1,00,000 cases of AIDS may have already occurred.<sup>2</sup>

This study was planned to determine the level of knowledge and attitudes of undergraduates about HIV and sex and to find out the source of their knowledge.

**MATERIAL AND METHOD:**

This study was conducted among undergraduates of Medical College, Engineering College and University of Gorakhpur. A total of 1289 students from 3 institutions were distributed the proforma. Out of these, 75 forms were rejected due to incomplete filling,

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and finally 1214 forms were analysed.

These students were given a self administered questionnaire. This questionnaire had 3 sections. Section I - Knowledge about HIV and AIDS, Section II - Attitudes towards HIV and AIDS, and Section III- Human sexuality. Questionnaires were distributed in the class rooms in about 25% of undergraduate population from these institutions selected randomly. Anonymity was maintained to enable the students to give genuine answers freely.

#### **RESULT:**

There were 898 male students and 316 female students out of a total of 1214. All the students were between 16 - 26 years of age.

**Aetiology of Disease :** 88.30% students knew that AIDS is caused by a virus. 97.86% male and 89.56% female students were correct in their knowledge about the cause of the disease.

**Modes of Spread:** More than 78% of the students knew correctly about all the modes of transmission i.e., sexual route, unsterilised needles, blood transfusion and transplacental route (Table - I).

Few students thought that it could spread by mosquito bites (17.21%), hugging (16.06%), kissing (38.06%), public toilets (17.63%), swimming pools (16.39%), and shaking hands (11.70%) (Table - II).

68.29% knew that a person could get infected with HIV without showing signs of the disease, and 76.77% knew that such person might infect others.

Having sex with one faithful partner decreases the chances of getting AIDS - 82.37% students were aware of this fact. 84.51% students agreed that using condoms minimized the chances of getting AIDS.

63.84% knew correctly the signs and symptoms of the disease. 87.56% students knew that blood test could diagnose the disease. 83.44% of them were aware that youth is the most affected group of the population.

Most of the students obtained knowledge about AIDS from TV. (24.21%), magazines (19.77%) and newspapers (19.44%) (Fig. 1)

Students' attitudes towards HIV are summarized in table - III. 69.69% students thought that they were not the kind of persons who were likely to get AIDS, although 71.17% said that anybody could get AIDS.

36% thought that one had oneself to blame if one got AIDS. 37.89% were of the opinion that they would not eat in a restaurant if a person there had AIDS.

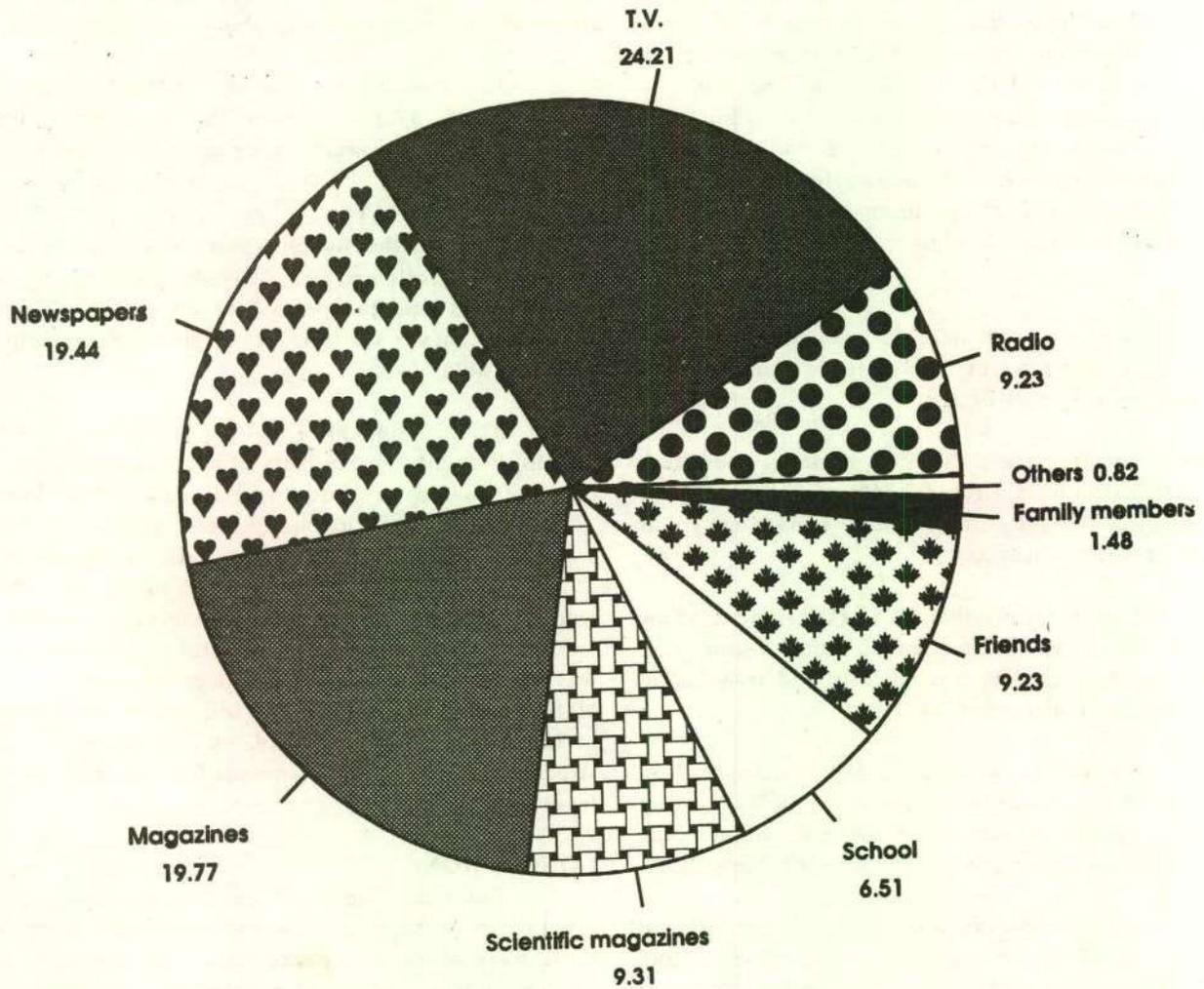
#### **HUMANSEXUALITY:**

Most of the students learned about sex from friends (36%), followed by books (31.31%) (Fig - II). 44.15% students said they would prefer to ask a doctor anything about sex while 43.66% would seek the help of friends (Table - IV).

52.72% students (59.13% male and 34.49% female) thought that students of their age indulged in sex, 15.16% said they did not and 32.12% did not know. Those who thought students of their age had sex when asked about the frequency of sex, said it was often in 21.56%, occasionally in 39.98% and rarely in 39.06% students. The knowledge about masturbation is shown in Table - V. 47.69% student population thought that it was safer to masturbate rather than going to a prostitute. 80.80% were of the opinion that sex education should be included in the study course. Out of these, 35.44% stressed that it should be included at the high school level (Table - VI).

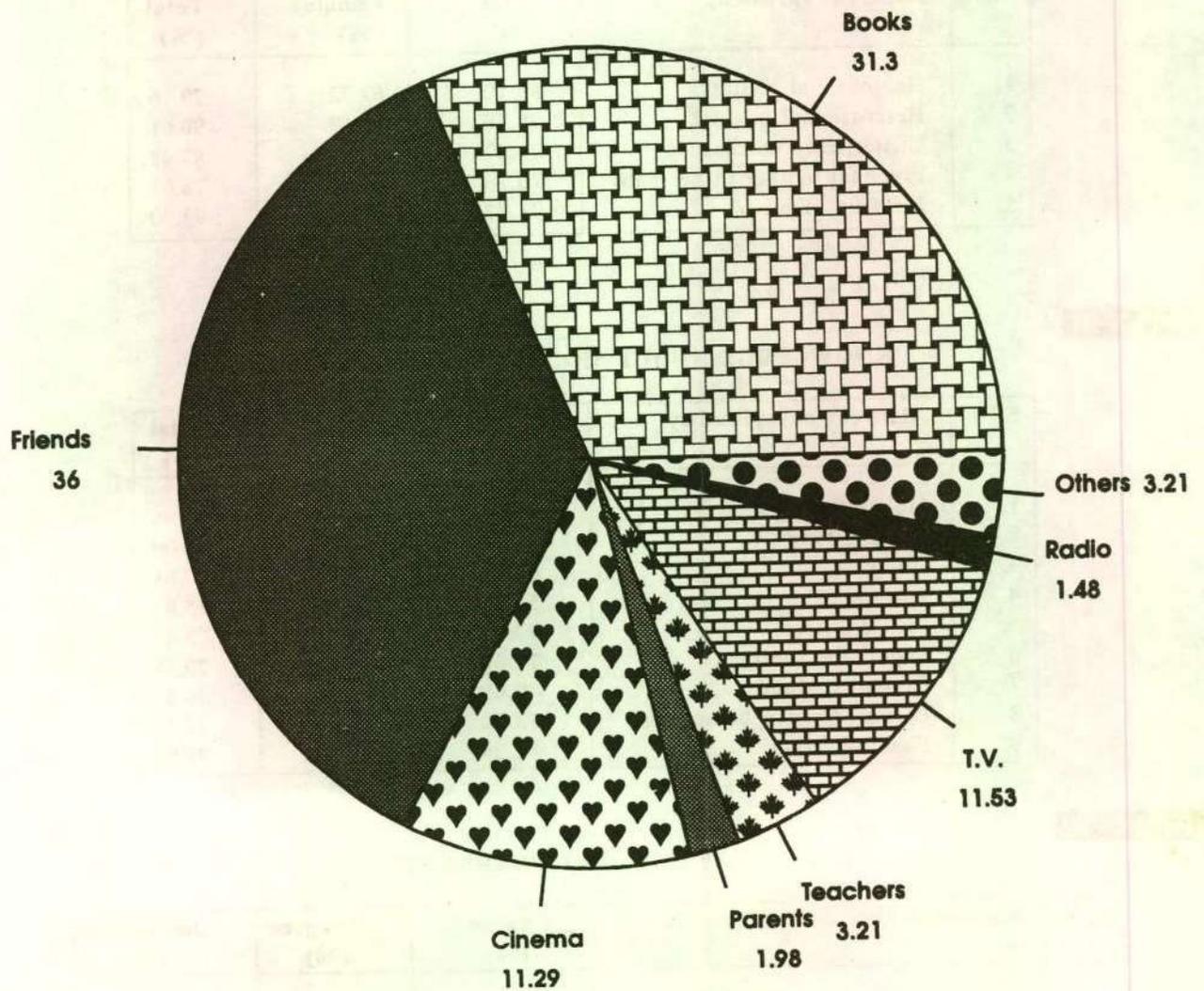
#### **CONCLUSION:**

From this study it can be said that general level of knowledge of the students was not poor, but there were a few misconceptions. An important and serious conclusion is that most of the students had no reliable means of obtaining correct information about these subjects. Therefore, schools and colleges should accept the challenge, and also, teachers and parents should be made aware of the need to guide and educate the youth regarding such matters.



**Source of knowledge about AIDS**

*Fig. 1*



Response to a question - Where did you learn about sex from ?

Fig. ̄

TABLE - I

## KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MODES OF SPREAD OF AIDS

S.No.	AIDS can spread by	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
1.	Homosexual contact	83.19	67.72	79.16
2.	Heterosexual contact	90.76	90.19	90.61
3.	Unsterilized needles	90.87	77.85	87.48
4.	Pregnant mother to her baby	76.73	81.65	78.01
5.	Infusion of blood	91.98	95.89	93.00

TABLE - II

## KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MODES OF SPREAD OF AIDS

S.No.	AIDS can not spread by	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
1.	Mosquito bites	74.72	75.63	74.96
2.	Sharing food	85.75	83.23	85.09
3.	Hugging	66.82	70.89	67.88
4.	Kissing	54.23	60.44	55.85
5.	Public toilets	74.05	79.43	75.45
6.	Swimming pools	71.60	66.14	70.18
7.	Donating blood	40.09	27.85	36.80
8.	Using patient's belongings	78.62	72.47	77.02
9.	Shaking hands	82.29	73.42	79.98

TABLE - III

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS HIV

S.No.	Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)
1.	Only sex workers can get AIDS	40.12	52.06	07.82
2.	Anybody can get AIDS	71.17	19.44	09.39
3.	Feel ashamed if I had AIDS	49.50	31.30	19.20
4.	Other students to be told if a student has AIDS	64.74	22.90	12.36
5.	Will not have friendship with a person who has AIDS	41.43	39.87	18.70
6.	AIDS patients should be fully isolated	38.29	51.07	10.71
7.	AIDS patients have no right to live along with normal individuals	23.23	66.97	09.80
8.	Will not visit a friend having AIDS	32.13	56.26	11.61

TABLE - IV

## PREFERRED CHOICES FOR ASKING ABOUT AIDS

If you want to ask something about sex, whom will you like to contact	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Parents	30	3.34	23	7.28	53	4.37
Friends	375	41.76	155	49.05	530	43.66
Teachers	52	5.79	4	1.27	56	4.61
Doctor	409	45.55	127	40.19	536	44.15
Others	32	3.56	7	2.21	39	3.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1214</b>	<b>100</b>

TABLE - V

## STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO A QUESTION RELATED TO THEIR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SEX.

Can masturbation cause	Sex	Yes		No		Can't say	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Loss of ability to have sex	M	179	19.93	4.39	4.89	280	31.18
	F	37	11.71	72	22.78	207	65.51
General weakness	M	278	30.96	353	39.31	267	29.73
	F	61	19.30	70	22.15	185	58.55
Loss of memory	M	101	11.25	488	54.34	309	34.41
	F	26	8.23	83	26.27	207	65.50

M = Male, F = Female

TABLE - VI

## STUDENT OPINION REGARDING STARTING OF SEX EDUCATION AT DIFFERENT LEVELS.

Sex	Primary school		Junior High school		High School		Intermediate		College	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	53	6.60	168	20.92	299	37.24	142	17.68	141	17.56
Female	40	14.55	25	9.09	83	30.18	72	26.18	55	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>8.63</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>17.90</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>35.44</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>19.85</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>18.18</b>

## REFERENCES

1. WHO AIDS series (10), School health education to prevent AIDS and STD.
2. ICMR Bulletin, December, 1996; Vol. 26, No. 12.