ORIGINAL ARTICLE

KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION SOURCES ON SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES INCLUDING AIDS OF STUDENTS ON TECHNICAL COURSES

CONHECIMENTO E FONTES DE INFORMAÇÃO SOBRE DST E AIDS DE ESTUDANTES DE CURSOS TÉCNICOS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to investigate the information sources of young people on the importance of adopting preventive behaviors regarding sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including AIDS and their knowledge with regard to these diseases. Method: this is an exploratory descriptive quantitative study with the application of a questionnaire to 100 students in a technical college in the city of João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brazil. Descriptive statistics was used in the analysis. The results are presented in tables and analyzed according to the literature. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Hospital Universitario Lauro Wanderley (HUW), under the Protocol 209/2010. Results: a total of 58.8% of the students attend the Nursing Technical course, 25% attend the Dental Prosthesis course and 16.3% attend the Biodiagnosis Technician course. The predominant age group was from 18 to 25 years (61.3%). The students are predominantly female (72.5%). With regard to the sources of information on STDs and AIDS, the primary source is the professor (87.5%) followed by the media (77.5%). Regarding the transmission routes of STDs and AIDS, 93.8% of the sample reported oral sex without a condom and 70% reported vertical transmission. Most students (89%) stressed condom as the method of choice for prevention. Conclusion: it is essential to propose a discussion on the theme as the statistics lead us to create more and more promotion and prevention practices with regard to STDs, stressing the vulnerability of young people. Descriptors: nursing; STD; AIDS; knowledge; vulnerability.

RESUMO

Objetivo: investigar as fontes de informações dos jovens sobre a importância da adoção de comportamentos preventivos às DSTs e AIDS e seu conhecimento em relação a essas enfermidades. Método: trata-se de um estudo exploratório e descritivo de natureza quantitativa realizado em uma escola de ensino profissionalizante na cidade de João Pessoa-PB, com amostra de 100 estudantes mediante a aplicação de um questionário. A estatística descritiva foi utilizada na análise. Os resultados foram apresentados em tabelas e analisados segundo a literatura. Este estudo foi aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa do Hospital Universitário Lauro Wanderley (HUW), sob o Protocolo n. 209/2010. Resultados: 58,8% dos estudantes cursam o Técnico de Enfermagem, 25% o Técnico em Próteses Dentárias e 16,3% o Técnico em Biodiagnóstico. A faixa etária predominante foi dos 18 aos 25 anos (61,3%). A representação é predominantemente feminino, com 72,5%. Com relação às fontes de informação sobre DSTs e AIDS, a fonte prioritária é o professor (87,5%), seguida pela mídia (77,5%). Quanto às formas de transmissão das DSTs e AIDS, 93,8% da amostra citou o sexo oral sem camisinha e 70% citou a transmissão vertical. Quanto à prevenção, 89% dos estudantes apontam a camisinha como método de escolha. Conclusão: é imprescindível propor uma discussão a respeito da temática, já que as estatísticas nos induzem a criar cada vez mais práticas de promoção e prevenção no que tange às DSTs, com ênfase para a vulnerabilidade de jovens. Descritores: enfermagem; AIDS; conhecimento; vulnerabilidade.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: investigar las fuentes de información de los jóvenes acerca de la importancia de la adopción de conductas preventivas de ETS y SIDA y su conocimiento en relación a esas enfermedades. Método: este es un estudio exploratorio y descriptivo de naturaleza cuantitativa que tuvo lugar en una escuela de enseñanza profesional en la ciudad de João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brasil, con una muestra de 100 estudiantes mediante la aplicación de un cuestionario. La estadística descriptiva fue utilizada en el análisis. Los resultados se presentaron en tablas y analizados según la literatura. Este estudio fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación del Hospital Universitario Lauro Wanderley (HUW), bajo el Protocolo 209/2010. Resultados: 58.8% de los estudiantes cursan el Técnico de Enfermería, 25% cursan el Técnico en Prótesis Dental y 16.3% cursan el Técnico en Biodiagnóstico. La franja etaria predominante fue de los 18 hasta los 25 años (61,3%). La representación es predominantemente femenina, con 72,5%. Con relación a las fuentes de información sobre ETS y SIDA, la fuente principal es el profesor (87,5%), seguida por los medios de comunicación (77,5%). Cuando a los modos de transmisión de las ETS y SIDA, el 93,8% de la muestra citó el sexo oral sin condón y 70% citó la transmisión vertical. En cuanto a la prevención, 89% de los estudiantes apuntó el condón como método de elección. Conclusión: es imprescindible proponer un debate acerca de la temática, ya que las estadísticas nos induzcan a crear cada vez más prácticas de promoción y prevención de ETS, con énfasis en la vulnerabilidad de los jóvenes. Descriptores: enfermería; SIDA; conocimiento; vulnerabilidad.
INTRODUCTION

Young adults have distinctive features in this development phase of life, including concerns with respect to expectations outside the family life and independence, conscious of their rights and duties, are specific to this age group. During this period, the construction of a positive identity is needed in order to form the sexuality of the individual in a responsible manner, free from coercion. Thus, the lack or precariousness of places of leisure, sports and cultural activities, which offer real alternatives for young people to spend their spare time productively, often makes this population idle, which may hamper their education as conscious and discerning subjects, especially with regard to health.1

In Brazil there are about 31 million young people aged from 16 to 24 years, representing 18% of the country's total population.2 Many of these young people do not have access to information on sexuality and reproductive health, nor to appropriate healthcare services that would encourage them to freely take decisions with responsibility.

It is important to mention that public healthcare policies are part of a larger range of strategies used to improve the assistance provided to the population, whether they are projects of society defined with conflict of interests, or in the correlation of forces. Thus, factors that determine public policy for a sector often arise from specific problematic social issues and require government measures.

Problems such as drug addiction, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including AIDS among teenagers are specific social issues which demand drastic interventions; the State cannot act only in the educational field or any other area in isolation.

Thus, the experience of sexuality among young people is of particular interest in scientific research, to the extent that, in addition to anatomical aspects, all other aspects of sexual identity are the result of socialization processes, more specifically from the process of gaining culture which includes the process of learning about sexual practices.1

Studies in the area show that between one and two thirds of the school population in São Paulo State do not protect themselves during sex.4 It is noticeable that unprotected sex can have serious consequences to the life of individuals, such as unwanted pregnancies and STDs including AIDS. The latter is considered a complex, dynamic and unstable international phenomenon; among other factors the transmission of AIDS in different regions of the world depends on determinants of individual and collective behavior.5

With regard to STDs and AIDS, adolescents and young people from developing countries constitute the population with the highest risk. According to estimates of the World Health Organization, there are approximately 340 million cases of sexually transmitted infections worldwide annually not including genital herpes and HPV. The repercussions of these infections are harmful when the proper treatment is not implemented quickly.6

The vulnerability of young people is a recognized fact in all societies of the world and so urgent investment, prioritizing the quality of health care for the adolescent population, is needed to guarantee the future. Statistics show that every 14 seconds a young person aged between 15-24 years is infected by HIV; of all new infections, nearly half occurs in this age range.7 Moreover, sex as the route of contamination represents around 55% of notified cases with the main subcategory being heterosexual relationships, followed by homosexual and bisexual relationships.8

Given this scenario, it seems pertinent to investigate the knowledge of youth about STDs including AIDS in order to obtain support to decide future health education measures. Indeed, educational policies targeted at adolescents and young people should be based on the identification of knowledge of these individuals about the health problem that affects a given population. Subsequently, a possible action or intervention strategy should be proposed based on a broad conception, including public policy, appropriate environment and reorganization of health services, as well as pedagogical proposals with commitment to the development of solidarity and citizenship with the essence of the actions being founded to improve the life and health.

Given the delicacy and complexity of the problem of STDs including AIDS in adolescents and young people, and of the individual and collective repercussions, the present study was conducted with a view to strengthening the role of nursing with discoveries that might contribute to the development of educational measures promoting the health of young people with a healthy experience in sexuality.
Thus the current study aimed to check the knowledge of young people in relation to STDs including AIDS and investigate the sources of information of these young people about the importance of behavior to prevent these illnesses.

The relevance of this research is justified by the fact that the field of research is a technical college which is dedicated to vocational training in health services; thus students should, during their training, build and improve knowledge that contributes to the promotion of individual and collective health. Moreover, the results of this study may serve as support for possible measures on sex education and reproductive health involving professors and students in the research field.

**METHOD**

This was a descriptive exploratory quantitative study carried out in a technical college located in the municipality of João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brazil which provides courses for the following professions: Nursing Technician, Technician in Dental Prosthesis and Technician in Biodiagnosis. The college is also involved in the development of other professional training courses and courses of related areas.

The study population was made up of 159 individuals; as data collection was possible by census, calculation of the sample was unnecessary. It is important to remember that census is better indicated in the case of small populations. Thus, 100 students on vocational technical courses offered by that institution participated in the study.

Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire, containing open and closed questions, to characterize the sociodemographic profile of the students, their knowledge about STDs including AIDS and the sources of information about the importance of behavior to prevent these illnesses.

The survey was conducted after participants of each course signed informed consent forms separately in the classrooms. The only exclusion criterion was age less than eighteen years. The questionnaires were applied at times previously set with professors so as to avoid disturbing teaching activities. After completion, the unidentified questionnaires were placed in a ballot box in order to ensure privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided, as well as to protect participants from embarrassment.

The analysis initially used descriptive statistics; the frequencies of each variable were calculated and presented in tables as percentages. The results were analyzed in the light of current literature.

The ethical and legal aspects of research involving human subjects, as recommended by resolution No. 196/96 of the National Health Council, were obeyed in the development of this study. The field study was started after obtaining the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Lauro Wanderley University Hospital (HULW) - Protocol 209/2010.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In terms of the characterization of the sample, most participants were aged between 18 and 25 years old (50%) and the majority were female (74%).

The participants were from the Nursing Technical, Dental Prosthesis Technical and Biodiagnosis Technical Courses. However, the distribution of students per course show that the largest contingent was on the Nursing Technical Course (67%). Possibly, the predominance of students on the Nursing Technical Course arises from the fact that it is the oldest technical course offered by Universidade Federal da Paraíba.

On associating gender with profession, one can see that caregiving has always been linked to women given the responsibilities of care of the home and of the family. In contemporary Brazilian nursing, although there is a historical affinity of women in care, gender discrimination restricts the participation of men in the profession. Although nursing is culturally considered a profession for women, it is becoming increasingly more common to find men working as nurses, which is an important breakthrough against gender stereotypes.

Aspects relating to sources of data about STDs including AIDS show that information is mostly from professors (87%) and the television (76%). It should be mentioned that less than half of the students (39%) stated that nursing professionals gave information on this topic. However, around 50% of students reported that physicians informed them about STDs. Note that parents were in the fifth place (36%) as the most cited source of information (Table 1).
In this survey, professors are at the forefront of the search for information; this is possibly a reflection of the need to obtain a reliable source associated with trust developed during the education process. It is important to mention that most professors involved in the training of these students are professionals in healthcare and similar areas, such as nurses, dentists, biomedical professionals and psychologists.

The great majority of young people, who reported the media as the source of information, placed newspapers, the internet and television in ascending order. This data reveals a lack of information from parents, which is of much concern, as the values and information transmitted by the family constitute the basis of the individual development of everyone.⁶

Hence, the lack of demand for information by young people from parents highlights the misinformation about the subject combined with a lack of preparation of the family to give guidance on sexuality. Studies show that, in most cases, teenagers start their sex life at a time that they are not prepared, i.e. with little maturity to terms of sexual knowledge.¹⁴

The most common reasons attributed to this are the feeling of embarrassment between parents and their children, the lack of knowledge about STDs and the lack of freedom to speak with young people, results of a culture in which sex is still surrounded by preconception and taboo, leading to greater vulnerability to contamination.¹⁵

With respect to the modes of transmission of these diseases, the most common was oral sex without using a condom (91%), followed by vaginal sex without a condom (73%), vertical transmission (72%) and anal sex without a condom (71%). It is noteworthy that 21% of the students cited kissing on the mouth as a way of transmitting these infections (Table 2).

Together with the active transmission routes cited by the respondents, are promiscuous sexual practices such as frequently changing partners. Associated with this, low socioeconomic conditions, bad situation of health services (both basic and specialized) and inadequate sex education and knowledge and, above all, the non-use of preventive measures, cause higher transmission rates and incidence of STDs.¹⁶

On referring to signs and symptoms of AIDS, 94% of the students referred to weight loss, the classical clinical sign in the advanced stage of the disease. Other characteristic manifestations of the disease were also cited such as fever (54%), night sweats (46%) and diarrhea (44%), as well as candidiasis (41%). It should be made clear that the least mentioned clinical sign was dry cough, cited by only 13% of the sample (Table 3).
HIV infection presents, as a pathogenic action, the involvement of the functioning of the immune system; the infection can be incubated and quiet for a while before the symptoms of the disease are seen. Virulence increases the probability of an individual developing AIDS. Therefore, with the defense reduced, there is a higher risk of acquiring infections. So when a person is infected by AIDS, a variety of signs and symptoms can be manifested depending on the opportunistic infection that the individual has at the time; weight loss is common in the acute phase of opportunistic infections. Therefore, the variability of responses obtained and the high citation index for weight loss may reflect a good understanding of the symptoms. In addition, it is believed that the dry cough cited by some students is related to susceptibility to respiratory infections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs and symptoms of AIDS</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight loss</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fever</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night sweats</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidiasis</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red blotches on the skin</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry cough</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

With regard to partners, it is pertinent to point out the importance of establishing relationships based on conjugal faithfulness, since studies show that the trust shown to a partner, in particular by women, is one of the most common reasons for ceasing preventive behavior. Especially after couples decide not to use condoms during sex to prevent HIV and after testing negative for HIV, prevention is guaranteed by a faithful conjugal relationship. The high rate of students who reported the use of condoms as a preventive measure, can be a reflection of information given by the media and not necessarily an active method of prevention used by them. It should be mentioned that health education was described as a preventive measure, albeit by a small percentage of students. This health strategy will facilitate the prevention of these diseases because it is a means of empowering individuals and the community, so that they can exercise greater control over their own health and on the environment in which they live, as well as make choices that lead to a better life.

As is illustrated in Table 5, most students believe that AIDS has no cure (59%) and that it is treated with medications (87%). A small number of participants reported that there is a cure (10%) and an even smaller number still said there was a vaccine as a type of treatment (2%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of preventing STDs including AIDS (João Pessoa, 2011)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevention of sexually transmitted diseases n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of disposable syringes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blood for tested before transfusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>The pill</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The results are relevant, as most students recognize that there is a palliative therapeutic therapy for this disease. It should be noted that more than half of the study sample said that AIDS has no cure, reaffirming its status of a chronic and transmittable disease. A small percentage of students said that AIDS is curable, thus demonstrating the
need for health educational focused on the deconstruction of knowledge which is inconsistent with reality.

More recently, there has been the emergence of stop-gap actions related to the treatment of this syndrome, such as a vaccine developed by North American researchers with the purpose of reducing the viral load and reducing clinical symptoms.¹⁹

### CONCLUSION

Various activities involving STDs and AIDS are delicate in their development, as fears, discrimination, coping difficulties, chastity, doubts, myths and beliefs are part of the essence and the surroundings of the people involved in this process; researchers and research are superficially linked due to the nuances of investigations through expressions, looks, gestures and speech.

The analysis of the results showed that a significant percentage of students have knowledge on the subject, but more information is needed. Thus, we believe in the possibility of contributing to the socialization of information and the construction of knowledge promoting the health of these young people in particular by highlighting the role of health education as cited by the study participants.

Note that the main source of information for students was their professors, an extremely important finding because it highlights the educator’s role as a fundamental element, by spreading knowledge to contribute to the health and consequently to better professional training of these students.

Indeed, it is important that teachers are imbued with the motivation to discuss and exchange knowledge and along with relatives, health professionals and authorities to propose actions directed to promoting and preventing the bad effects of STDs including AIDS in particular in relation to the vulnerability of young people.

In this respect, the findings of this research show the need for planning of educational measures in health that provide spaces for discussion and reflection about sexuality and sex health, trying to deconstruct misconceptions about STDs including AIDS.

Moreover, these spaces will reduce fears, myths and prejudices that might be identified, so as to help young people to understand their own sexuality, to reflect on the risks and realize to what extent each individual has responsibility for their own sexual health.

### REFERENCES


