

KNOWLEDGE OF HEPATITIS B VIRUS, HEPATITIS C VIRUS AND HUMAN IMMUNODEFFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV) AMONG ATTENDANTS OF PATIENTS VISITING OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENTS.

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ABSTRACT

Objective:- To assess the level of knowledge regarding hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV among attendants of patients visiting OPD of a tertiary care hospital. **Study design:** - Cross-sectional study. **Setting:** -Outpatient departments of Nishtar Medical University, Multan. **Subjects and methods:** - Three hundred and eight attendants of patients coming to the OPDs of Nishtar Hospital Multan were included and interviewed in this cross-sectional study. Non-probability convenient sampling technique was used. All the data was entered and analyzed by SPSS version 20. **Results:** - Three hundred and eight subjects were interviewed. The age of subjects varied from 15-70 years. The mean age was 37.06 years \pm 15.59 years Two hundred and twenty three (72.4 %) were familiar with hepatitis B, 196 (63.6%) with hepatitis C and 146 (47.4%) with HIV and 133 (43.2%) were familiar with all three viruses while 81 (26.5%) were unfamiliar with these viruses. Most of the subjects 93 (30.2%) knew about the transmission through injection by un-sterilized syringes, 90 (29.2%) were knowing that infected blood is important source of spread while 87 (28.2%) of the subjects were knowing that these are spread through infected razors. 84 (27.2%) were knowing unsafe sex as a mode of transmission. Sharing objects can be the source of spread was known to very less number of people, 9 (2.9%) were aware that these can spread through sharing infected tooth brushes, 7 (2.3%) with sharing infected "Miswaks" and only 3 (1%) were aware that these can spread through infected combs. Electronic media was the major source of knowledge 82 (26.6%), interpersonal communication 69 (22.4%) and newspapers in only 1 (0.3%). **Conclusion:** - knowledge about hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV is low in our study population. The results of the study have shown that many people still think that HIV is the only virus which is transmitted through sexual contacts and hepatitis B and C through contaminated blood. The knowledge about the modes of transmission is lower in the rural and uneducated community. General public has very little knowledge that infected combs, infected toothbrushes and infected "Miswaks" can also lead to transmission of hepatitis B and C. Electronic media particularly television & radio and newspapers are the main source of knowledge and awareness for the urban population while in rural population it is not the case. Effective health awareness campaigns are needed to be started among rural population

Keywords: - Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV.

INTRODUCTION

Viral hepatitis is a global issue, especially hepatitis B and C are increasing day by day. HIV is a major threat in Africa, South East Asia and the western world. However HIV cases are also being reported from Pakistan¹. Hepatitis B and C are known as cytopathic viruses as they directly affect the liver. HIV affects the immune system of the body and poses the affected patient to serious threats. In adults acute hepatitis B usually recovers in 90% of the cases and 10% acquire chronic hepatitis B², while chronicity is more marked with hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hepatitis B virus has infected more than two thousand million people worldwide and there are estimated 350 million carriers³. UK and USA have carrier rate (0.5%) and it rises to 10-15% in parts of Africa, Middle East and Far East^{2,4}. Study conducted in Pakistan by Khokhar et al has reported prevalence of HBsAg as 2.56%⁵.

Throughout the world varying prevalence rates for HCV have been reported. Extremely low anti-HCV prevalence (0.1%) has been reported among blood donors in UK and Scandinavia; a slightly higher prevalence (0.2 to 1 %) has been reported from other European countries, Australia and Northern America; and intermediate

prevalence (1.1 to 5%) has been reported in South America, Eastern Europe, Mediterranean countries; the highest prevalence (28%) has been reported in Egypt as cited by Muhammad et al ⁶.

In Pakistan various studies reported varying prevalence rates for hepatitis C. The prevalence in professional blood donors has ranged from 1.18 % in southern Pakistan to 6.21 % in Northern Parts^{7,8}.

Recently PMRC has conducted a national survey on prevalence of hepatitis B and C in general population of Pakistan. The preliminary reports reveal that HBsAg is positive in 2.5% and Anti-HCV in 4.9%. Thus overall positivity for both these viruses is 7.4%. According to this survey about 12 million population of Pakistan is affected by these viruses⁹.

HIV infection can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) was first recognized in USA in 1981. The spectrum of diseases caused by HIV varies from opportunistic infections to malignant neoplasms. The mode of transmission of HIV is similar to that of hepatitis B and C in particular with respect to sexual and parenteral transmission. Sexual route of transmission is more common with HIV. The risk of acquiring HIV infection from a needle stick injury with infected blood is approximately 1 in 300. Factors which are known to increase transmission include depth of needle penetration, hollowbore needles, invisible blood on the needles and advance stage of the disease in the source¹⁰. The risk of HIV infection from illicit drug use with sharing of needles from HIV infection source is estimated to be 1 in 150 ¹⁰. Transfusion of infected blood poses the recipient at a risk of 95% transmission. Mother to infant transmission can also occur. Hepatitis B, C and HIV have not been shown to be transmitted by respiratory droplet spread and by vectors like mosquitoes¹⁰.

Different treatment options and preventive measures are available to control the spread of these viruses. The vaccine is available for hepatitis B. No vaccine is available against hepatitis C and HIV. To curtail a disease in the community, the utmost important is the knowledge of the diseases in that community. The present study was designed to assess the level of basic knowledge about hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV in general population of peripheral areas of Multan. This assessment of knowledge will help to develop and plan the preventive strategies against these dreadful viruses.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Three hundred and eight attendants of patients coming to the OPDs of Nishtar Hospital Multan were included and interviewed in this cross-sectional study. Non-probability convenient sampling technique was used. The study participants were explained about the purpose of the study. The subjects of either sex and of adult ages were included in this study. Informed consent was taken and confidentiality of the personal information was ensured. All the data was analyzed by SPSS version 20.

RESULTS

Three hundred and eight subjects were interviewed, the age of subjects varied from 15-70 years. The mean age was 37.06 ±15.59 years. Eighty eight (28.6%) were males and 220 (71.4%) were females. Two hundred and sixty five (86.0%) of the subjects were married while 43 (14.0 %) were unmarried. All the subjects were from peripheral areas of Multan. Personal hygiene was also observed. It was poor in 236 (76.6%), satisfactory in 63 (20.5%) and good in only 9 (2.9%) subjects. One hundred eighty five (60.1%) were illiterate, 34 (11.0%) were having non-formal education, 40 (13.0%) primary education, 20 (6.5%) were having middle level education, 26 (8.4%) had secondary level of education and only 3 (1.0%) had higher secondary and above level of education. Knowledge about hepatitis revealed 223 (72.4%) of the subjects were familiar with hepatitis B, 196 (63.6%) with hepatitis C and 146 (47.4%) with HIV and 133 (43.2%) were familiar with all the three virus while 81 (26.3%) were unfamiliar with these virus. As the knowledge about the spread of these viruses was assessed and it was found that ninety three (30.2%) knew about their transmission through injection by un-sterilized syringes. Ninety (29.2%) were knowing that these can spread through blood, 83 (26.9%) were having knowledge of their spread through dental procedure with infected instruments, 84 (27.2%) were knowing that these can also spread through unsafe sex. Eighty three (26.9%) were familiar that these can spread by tattooing. Eighty four (27.2%) were knowing that these can also spread by piercing of ear and nose through infected needles. Eighty seven (28.2%) were familiar that these can spread through infected razors. Eighty three (26.9%) were knowing that these can also spread through self infliction as a part of religious activity (matam) with infected sharp chains, 85 (27.6%) were knowing that these can spread through infected knives. Sharing objects can be the source of spread was known to very less number of people, 9 (2.9%) were aware that these can spread through sharing infected tooth brushes, 7 (2.3%) with sharing infected "Miswaks" and only 3 (1%) were aware that these can spread through infected combs. When these subjects were tested for the source of their knowledge, 82 (26.6%) acquired this through electronic media like television and radio. Sixty nine (22.4%) were having this knowledge through

interpersonal communication, 1 (0.3%) through newspaper, 51 (16.6%) through electronic media and interpersonal communication, 6 (1.9 %) acquired the knowledge through electronic media and newspapers, 3 (1.0 %) through news and interpersonal and 16 (5.2%) were having the knowledge from all the sources.

Table-1 Level of Education **n= 308**

Level of Education	No of subjects	Percentage
Illiterate	185	60.1 %
Non-formal education	34	11.0 %
Primary Education	40	13.0 %
Middle Education	20	06.5 %
Secondary Education	26	08.4 %
Higher Secondary & above	03	01.0 %

Table-2 Assessment of knowledge about viruses **n = 308**

Viruses	No of subjects having knowledge	Percentage
Knowledge about hepatitis B	223	72.4 %
Knowledge about hepatitis C	196	63.6 %
Knowledge about HIV	146	47.4 %
Knowledge about hepatitis B&C and HIV	133	43.2 %
Don't know	81	26.3 %

Table-3 Knowledge about modes of transmission **n = 308**

Modes	No of subjects having knowledge about modes of transmission	Percentage
Un-sterilized syringes	93	30.2 %
Contaminated blood	90	29.2 %
Dental procedure with Infected instruments	83	26.9 %
Unsafe sex	84	27.2 %
Tattooing	83	26.9 %
Ear/nose piercing with infected needles	84	27.3 %
Infected razors	87	28.2 %
Self infliction(matam) with chains	83	26.9 %
Infected knives	85	27.6 %
Sharing of sharp objects	09	02.9 %
Infected tooth brushes	07	02.3 %
Infected Miswaks	03	01.0 %
Infected combs		

Table-4 Source of knowledge **n = 308**

Sources	No of subjects with source of knowledge	Percentage
Electronic Media	82	26.6 %
Interpersonal communications	69	22.4 %
Newspaper	01	00.3 %
Electronic media/interpersonal communication	51	16.6 %
Electronic media/newspaper	06	01.9 %
Newspaper/interpersonal communication	03	01.0 %
All sources	16	05.2%

DISCUSSION

Hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV are emerging pathogens through out the world. Hepatitis B and C are common viral infections in Pakistan. HIV cases are also being reported from Pakistan¹. As we know awareness about the disease is necessary for its prevention and control. It is evident through epidemiological studies that hepatitis B and C viruses are mainly transmitted through parenteral route. The transmission risk of these viruses increases among persons who are given therapeutic injections by un-sterilized syringes, by sharing of infected needles among IV drug abusers, having transfusion of contaminated blood, patients on haemodialysis, having unsafe sex, sharing of items like infected toothbrushes/ “Miswaks”, contaminated razors and infected combs, having dental procedure with infected instruments, having endoscopies with un-sterilized instruments, self infliction as a part of religious activity (matam) with infected sharp chains and persons who have their faces or armpits shaved with infected razors used by street barbers^{2,3,11}. The cosmetic alterations like body piercing or tattooing done by un-sterilized needles and use of infected tweezers are also threats for transmission of hepatitis viruses.

HIV is mainly transmitted through unsafe sex and IV drug abuse¹. In present study, as the knowledge about these viruses was assessed, 133 (43.2%) of the study cases were familiar with all three viruses while a study conducted by Memon et al¹², among healthcare workers of tertiary care setting of Karachi about knowledge attitude and practice on hepatitis B and C revealed that 61% of the subjects were aware about these viruses and their modes of transmission. This reported higher level of knowledge in the study by Memon et al¹² may be due to better level of education and health awareness as their study was conducted among healthcare workers.

As the knowledge about the spread of these viruses was tested, it revealed that 93 (30.2%) of the subjects know that these are spread through by the use of un-sterilized syringes. Ninety (29.2%) were knowing the infected blood as mode of transmission and 83 (26.9%) were knowing its spread through dental procedure with infected instruments. Unsafe sex was known to 84 (27.2%) as a risk factor. Eighty three (26.9%) were knowing tattooing as an important mode of transmission. Infected razors, ear/nose piercing and self infliction as a part of religious activity (matam) with infected sharp chains were known to 87 (28.2%), 84 (27.2%), and 83 (26.9%) respectively as important mode of transmission. Sharing infected objects like infected tooth brushes, “Miswaks” and infected combs were known to be as important factors in spread of these viruses, in 9 (2.9%), 7 (2.3%) and 3 (1.0%) of the subjects respectively. A study by Memon et al¹² revealed that 61% of the respondents knew all modes of transmission of hepatitis B and C and 88% were having knowledge that these are spread through parenteral route. A review study on “Unsafe injections in the developing world and transmission of bloodborne pathogens” described conservative estimates of average number of injections per person per year varies from 0.9 to 8.5 % with a median of 1.5% injections by Simonsen et al¹³. They also described that highest prevalence was reported from Pakistan¹³. This fact that these viruses are spread through un-sterilized injections was known to 30.2% of the subjects in our study. Khan et al,¹⁴ from their study conducted on female college students revealed that 90% of the girls were knowing that HIV/AIDS is sexually transmitted and the association of hepatitis B and C with contaminated needles was known to 87% and 64% of the subjects respectively and 88% of girls responded that HIV is also spread by contaminated needles. She described that HIV knowledge of the subjects was satisfactory while knowledge about hepatitis B and C was low among the college girls. So we can have observation that many people still think that HIV is the virus transmitted through sexual contacts while they know that hepatitis B and C are spread through contaminated blood. Shah et al,¹⁵ revealed from study on knowledge regarding hepatitis B conducted among EPI vaccinators from Karachi revealed that 47% of the subjects responded that hepatitis B virus is spread through infected blood, 50% responded that it is spread through contaminated needles, 25% responded that it is spread through un-sterilized instruments and only 22% knew that it can also be spread through sexual contacts. The level of knowledge about these viruses reported in the above studies is higher, the difference may be due to the level of education of the study subjects. The study subjects in the above studies were college girls and EPI vaccinators and were having secondary or more level of education while in our study the subjects were from general public of rural community and 61% were illiterate. Khan et al¹⁶ and Simonsen et al,¹³ have given more weight to the contaminated needles and multiple injections with un-sterilized syringes as mode of spread and study cited by Alam¹⁷ reports that hollow bore needles transmit these viruses more as compared to the other sharp objects and 10-25% injuries occur while re-capping the used needles, so the knowledge about this preventive aspect needs special consideration. It is further pointed out here that under Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on blood borne pathogen has prohibited re-capping of the needles¹⁸. So in general, knowledge about the viruses and their spread was higher among the educated communities as compared to the rural community where the level of education is low and people are more shy and reluctant to answer such special questions. It is stressed and pointed out here that the general public was having very little knowledge that infected combs, infected toothbrushes and infected “Miswaks” can lead to transmission of hepatitis B and C. In our population infected razors are also very important mode of transmission

which needs special attention. It is very pertinent to point here that the razors can be sterilized with common house hold bleach. Concentrations ranging from 500ppm (1:100 dilutions of house hold bleach) to 5000ppm (1:10 dilutions of household bleach) for 10 minutes have been found to be effective against HCV¹⁹.

When the subjects were tested for the source of knowledge electronic media 82 (26.2%) and interpersonal communication 69 (22.4%) were the main source of their knowledge in our study. It was evident that 80 (26.5%) of the subjects were not familiar with either hepatitis B, C and HIV. Khan et al,¹⁴ in their study described TV as their main source of knowledge in 92% of the respondents.

So it is clear that the electronic media particularly television and newspapers are the main source of knowledge and awareness for the urban population while in rural population it is not the case. So the effective awareness programme must be started in the rural communities. They have poor knowledge that sharing common objects like infected combs, infected tooth brushes, "Miswaks", nail clippers are important modes of spread. More and more stress should be given on these aspects. Health awareness campaigns, medical camps, TV and radio programme on health in local and simple language should be started keeping in view the educational and intellectual level of the community. Schools are the important places where teacher- parents and teacher-students communications can play significant role in the awareness programmes on these common issues. Health care personals, lady health visitors, social workers and non-government organization should be properly made aware about these viruses because they are in direct contact and more friendly with the community and these measures especially interpersonal communications will increase the level of education among that community regarding these dreadful diseases, with fruitful out come. It is suggested that further studies with large sample size should be carried out in rural, urban and high risk population.

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