

Knowledge, attitudes and practices related to syphilis among undergraduates of University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

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Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including syphilis, constitute a significant global public health problem. University students, as a sexually active population, exhibit diverse levels of knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) concerning syphilis, which can affect the efforts of disease prevention and control. This research aimed to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding syphilis among undergraduates of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. A quantitative cross-sectional study was conducted with 400 third-year undergraduates using proportional convenience sampling from all ten faculties. Data were gathered through a self-administered questionnaire, and participants were classified as having good or poor knowledge based on their total knowledge scores. Attitudes and practices were analyzed descriptively, and associations between demographic variables and KAP indicators were examined using SPSS. The mean age of participants was 24.21 years (SD = 1.64), with 32.5% male and 66.8% female students. The mean knowledge score was 49.04% (SD = 27.41), indicating a moderate level of knowledge. Students from health faculties demonstrated significantly higher knowledge compared to those from non-health faculties ($p < 0.001$). A considerable proportion of students (37.5%) held the misconception that syphilis is not serious because it is curable, a belief significantly associated with gender ($p = 0.002$). While 76.8% of students reported not actively considering syphilis as a personal health concern, 55.8% indicated unwillingness to participate in a syphilis prevention programme. Furthermore, students from non-health faculties were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours ($p < 0.05$). In conclusion, the average knowledge on syphilis among participants was moderate at 49%, students from health related faculties exhibited greater understanding than the students from non-health related faculties. Misconceptions about syphilis were prevalent. Most students did not view syphilis as a priority health concern and were disinclined to engage in prevention programmes. Students from non-health related faculties demonstrated higher risk sexual behaviours, highlighting the need for targeted educational and preventive interventions tailored to this population.

Keywords: *Syphilis, Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP), University students*