KNOWLEDGE OF HIV/AIDS AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN IN AN URBAN HEALTH CLINIC – A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Vinothini A1, Khoo EM1, Adeeba K2

1 Department of Primary Care Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.
2 Infectious Disease Unit, Department of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

Abstract

Introduction. The aim of this study is to determine pregnant women's knowledge regarding AIDS and to identify factors affecting their knowledge. This information would provide some baseline data in designing health education measures for this target group.

Methods. A face-to-face interview was carried out on one hundred pregnant women attending an urban antenatal clinic in Malaysia between October and November 1999.

Results. The mean age of the women was 27.8 years old (SD=5.0, range 20 – 40 years). In general, these women had good knowledge of HIV and AIDS. More than 80% of them were aware of the main modes of HIV transmission. However, only half knew that HIV could be transmitted through breastfeeding. Sixty percent of women had the misconception that the virus could be acquired through blood donation. There was a lack of knowledge regarding the symptoms and the progression of AIDS. More than 90% of the women knew that AIDS is incurable. Three quarters of them were aware that early treatment can slow down the progression of the disease, but only 16% knew that maternal HIV transmission can be reduced by treatment. Good knowledge was positively correlated with higher level of education (p<0.05).

Discussion. Although health education programs in Malaysia have succeeded in educating pregnant women regarding AIDS in general, certain important information is still not being disseminated. Future health education should formulate targeted strategies to overcome this problem.

Keywords: acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, knowledge, pregnant women.

Introduction

The role of heterosexual transmission in facilitating the spread of HIV in Malaysia has become increasingly important. An increasing number of women had been infected with HIV in the last few years. According to the annual report by the Ministry of Health, Malaysia, the percentage of females infected with HIV had increased from 0.93% in 1990 to 3.83% in 1995 and 5.06% in 1997. The number of HIV infected babies was also on the rise. In 1996 and 1997, a total of 15 and 20 newborns respectively were reported to be infected.1

As a result of this increasing incidence of HIV infection, the government had set up a National AIDS Prevention and Control Program in 1992. Some of the objectives of the control program are to prevent HIV/AIDS transmission and to control its spread through strategies that include promotion of healthy lifestyle based on good virtues. Routine screening of antenatal mothers to prevent maternal transmission of HIV is carried out. In order to achieve these objectives, health education to the community regarding the modes of transmission, symptoms and progression of the disease and effective ways for its prevention are crucial. As pregnant women can confer maternal transmission of HIV, this group should be targeted for detailed study about their knowledge on AIDS. An understanding of their level of knowledge will enable an effective design of public health education measure.

A literature search revealed scarce data on pregnant women's knowledge of AIDS. In China, pregnant women were shown to have a lack of awareness regarding AIDS. A third of them did not know that HIV could be transmitted from mother...