

Awareness Related to Sexual Health Among New Entrants of the Faculty of Science, University of Peradeniya

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Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus /Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) continue to pose major global public health challenges. The WHO reports over one million daily STI cases, primarily among adults aged 15–49, with 39 million people living with HIV in 2022. Hence, adequate sexual health awareness is essential to control STIs but research among young Sri Lankan adults is limited. Therefore, this pre- post intervention study aimed to assess and compare the baseline and post-intervention sexual health knowledge among the University of Peradeniya entrants. Data collection involved an initial survey to assess baseline knowledge, using an experts validated structured questionnaire among new entrants in a single faculty at the University of Peradeniya. This was followed by an awareness program, which included interactive lectures and demonstrations led by experts in medicine. A post-intervention survey, using the same questionnaire, assessed immediate knowledge changes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Among participants, awareness of communication, check-ups, and protective measures for sexual well-being, increased from 78.3% to 80.6% post-program. Awareness that STIs can be transmitted in absence symptoms increased from 72.6% to 97.2%. Improper condom disposal was noted, with 67% discarding them in trash bins, risking STI transmission. Awareness of hormonal contraceptives increased from 32.1% to 80.6% and 86.8% knew emergency contraception is effective within 72 hours. Even before awareness program, most participants (97.2%) recognized the need for immediate testing and treatment after potential STI and HIV/AIDS exposure. Further, following a condom use demonstration, 98% successfully applied it to a penile model on their first attempt. Pre-test responses were from 106 participants, but post-test responses were limited to 36 due to time constraints after the program extension. Hence, further statistical analyses were not conducted due to insufficient post-intervention responses. The findings suggest that, although most participants possess fundamental knowledge of sexual health, STIs and HIV/AIDS and prevention, gaps remained in safe sex practices, condom disposal and contraceptive use. Therefore, targeted educational interventions are necessary to enhance awareness and promote safer sexual health practices within the young adults.

Keywords: Contraceptive awareness, public health education, sexual health, sexually transmitted infections