

KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) INFECTION AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS AGED 18 – 20 IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN KALUTHARA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the world. Cervical carcinoma is one of the most recurrent and dangerous female cancer types, and HPV is the main cause of that condition. This study aimed to determine the knowledge and awareness of HPV infection among female students aged 18-20 in selected schools in Kalutara District, Sri Lanka. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted using a random cluster sampling method. Data was collected through pre-tested, validated, and self-administrated questionnaires. Statistical analysis of collected data was done using SPSS 28, and the data was graded according to Bloom's cut-off point. The association between students' Advanced-level subject streams and their knowledge and awareness of HPV was analyzed based on the Chi-Square test while considering the P value less than 0.05 as statistically significant. Among the 440 students who participated in this study, 142(32.2%) were from biology stream, 88(20%) were from physical science stream, 156(35.4%) were from commerce, and 56(12%) were from art stream. Out of all respondents, 212(48.1%) respondents had heard about HPV infection, but only 22(5%) respondents knew about the causes of HPV infection. Furthermore, according to the Bloom's cut off point, participants who gained marks 80-100% were considered as having high knowledge and awareness, those who scored 50-70% were categorized as having moderate knowledge and awareness, and those who scored less than 50% were considered as having low knowledge and awareness regarding HPV infection. Based on that, only 71(16.1%) of the participants had a high level of knowledge. The majority, comprising 369 (83.9%) individuals had a moderate level of knowledge about HPV. Moreover, 372(84.5%) had a moderate level of awareness about HPV, while 68 (15.4%) of the students had a low level of awareness of HPV infection. A significant association was found between participants' subject streams and their knowledge (P value - 0.001) and awareness (P value - 0.005) regarding HPV infection. Findings of the study highlight that most female students aged 18-20 in selected schools in Kalutara District, Sri Lanka had a moderate level of knowledge and awareness regarding HPV infection. Therefore, findings suggest a need for comprehensive HPV education and awareness programs at school level to enhance the knowledge and awareness of school students on HPV infection.

Keywords: *Human Papilloma Virus, Sexually Transmitted Infection, Knowledge, Awareness*

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