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HIV knowledge and change in sexual behaviour among youth in South Africa (2012): a retrospective analysis of risky sexual behaviour histories

Miles-Timotheus, Shamsunisaa

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Abstract

Background

The prevalence of HIV in South Africa is high. HIV knowledge is important for the prevention of HIV, with some studies finding a positive relationship and others stating that it is not enough. This study aims to address the controversy on the relationship between HIV knowledge and sexual behaviour.

Objective

To determine the levels and relationship between HIV knowledge and sexual behaviour history among youth in South Africa in 2012.

Method

The fourth South African National HIV, Behaviour and Health Survey, 2012 was used, the sample selected from this source includes sexually active individuals between the ages of 15 and 34. Data was used from 2012 as it is the latest South African National HIV, Behaviour and Health Survey available. Individuals 15-34 were selected due to availability of complete sexual history and for categorising purposes. The weighted sample size was 543,354. Percentages and cross tabulations were used to assess the changes in sexual behaviour history by the characteristics of youth and a binomial logistic regression was used to look at the relationship between HIV knowledge and consistency of condom use between the three most recent sexual partners. The survey asked participants about their condom use behaviour towards all three of their most recent sexual partners, allowing a condom use change variable to be created.

Results

This study found a significant association between HIV knowledge and condom use change. From this study 19% of individuals either used condoms inconsistently or showed a negative condom use change. Negative condom use change refers to behaviour where the participant

uses condoms consistently with the third most recent sexual partner but does not with the most recent sexual partner. Individuals with accurate knowledge ranging from 50-74% are actually 0.63 times less likely to use condoms inconsistently or show a negative condom change when compared to individuals who have between 75% and 100% accurate HIV knowledge. This shows that individuals with 50-74% accurate HIV knowledge are displaying safer behaviours than those who have more accurate HIV knowledge. This is an unexpected finding as studies which conclude that there is an association between HIV knowledge and condom use, usually find that an increase in HIV knowledge relates to an increase in safer sexual behaviours. Individuals who have below 50% accurate HIV knowledge are 2.56 times more likely compared to those with 75-100% HIV knowledge to use condoms inconsistently or show a negative change in condom use.

Conclusion

The hypothesis for this research was that there was no relationship between HIV knowledge and sexual behaviour history. The binary logistic regression produced significant results and hence we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that a probable relationship exists between HIV knowledge and sexual behaviour history. Knowledge of HIV was generally low, however knowledge that a condom could reduce the risk of contraction was high with approximately 96% answering correctly. The rate of HIV testing within South Africa among youth in 2012 was high however there was room to improve with approximately 60% reporting having had a HIV test done. More recent literature has however indicated that HIV testing has improved.

Keywords

HIV knowledge, risky sexual behaviour, South Africa, Youth