

Awareness of Hepatitis C in Non-Medical University Students in Karachi

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Hepatitis C in
Non-Medical
University
Students

ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine Awareness of Hepatitis C in Non-Medical University Students in Karachi.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study.

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at the NED University of Engineering and technology, Karachi University, Federal Urdu university, Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology from August 2018 to December 2018.

Materials and Methods: The sample of 396 students was taken through Non-Probability Purposive Sampling. An informed verbal consent was taken from the candidates. Pilot study was conducted to assess the authenticity of the questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was then distributed, got filled, data was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 20, with 95% confidence interval and 0.05 p-value.

Results: There were a total of 396 students who participated in the survey. The majority of the students were from field of engineering numbering 199(50.3%), followed by Arts Numbering 83(21%), Commerce 54(13.6%), BSc 60(15%).

Among the students, only 79 (19.9%) were aware that hepatitis C was a viral disease while 166(41.9%) thought that it was bacterial. The number of students who were aware that it is spread via unscreened blood was 275(69.4%) and that it is spread via sharing needles were 320 (80.8%). Regarding the prevention of hepatitis C, 296 (74.7%) knew that it was preventable while 281 (71%) thought that a vaccine existed for prevention of Hepatitis C.

252(63.6%) Students ensured that new syringes were used by the hospital staff whenever they visited hospital. 250 (63.1%) ensured that sterilized instruments were used during dental check up. 299(75%) made sure that new blades were used in hair dressing salons. 333 (84%) responded that they would not marry a Hepatitis C infected person. 145 (36.6%) students thought that the infected should be isolated from others. A majority 317(80%) had not attended a Hepatitis C awareness Seminar.

Conclusion: The result from the study showed the students to have gaps in their knowledge in certain areas pertaining to hepatitis C. Though the majority seemed to have sufficiently cautious practices, the attitudes of the students showed a greater need for awareness. This elaborates a need for greater effort for campaigning to increase the awareness.

Key Words: Hepatitis C, Awareness, Attitude, Practice, Non-medical, Students

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INTRODUCTION

Hepatitis C is a preventable yet a frequently incurable disease. It is caused by the hepatitis C virus and is usually transmitted via blood from an infected person. The disease can be fatal since it often causes chronic infection which may lead to cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma¹. The major culprits for the transmission of hepatitis C seem to be the use of contaminated medical equipment in unsafe medical practices, use of

contaminated blades by barbers, IV drug abuse, unscreened blood transfusions and neglect of proper personal hygiene². The WHO estimates that around 130 to 150 million people around the world suffer from chronic infection. Approximately 500,000 die each year. The most severely affected regions are Africa, Central and East Asia, the highest prevalence being in Egypt.³

The incidence of hepatitis C is significantly high in developing countries like Pakistan. An approximated prevalence is 4.8% with 10 million being infected.⁴ The underdeveloped health system, economic crisis and the high illiteracy rate are some of the major factors that prevent people from becoming aware of the various ways the virus is spread.⁵ Being the sixth most populous country in the world and having a high population growth rate, Pakistan's health resources are already spread thin.⁶ Consequently, the high cost of Ribavirin and pegylated interferon treatment limits the availability and the effectiveness of their use. Therefore, to control the spread of the disease the only

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viable option is to adopt prevention as the primary mode of defense against hepatitis C.⁷

Prevention at any meaningful level can only be possible if the general public has the proper knowledge and attitude towards the risk factors and consequences of hepatitis C.⁸ There are already some campaigns being carried out in Pakistan to increase the awareness about hepatitis C which includes public service messages via media and seminars at various educational institutions on world hepatitis day.⁹ However, in order to achieve a greater impact, the need for appropriate knowledge that should be imparted to students as part of their health education should be evaluated. Information acquired by such evaluation will thus provide guidance to better plan health, education curriculums and execute more effective campaigns.¹⁰

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross sectional study was conducted by adopting a quantitative method. A questionnaire had been developed for collection of data from university students, who were in study programs other than those related to biological fields and medicine.

Sites of study were four universities of Karachi i.e. NED University of Engineering and technology, Karachi University, Federal Urdu university, Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology within a study period of 4 months from August to December 2018.

Data was collected from 396 students from selected universities by using a close ended questionnaire. The ages of these participants ranged from 17 to 26. Both the genders were involved in the research. The students were sorted in field of study i.e. bachelors in engineering, arts, commerce and science Non-probability Purposive Sampling technique was adopted. An informed verbal consent was taken from the candidates. Pilot study was conducted to assess the authenticity of the questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was then distributed, got filled, data was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 20, with 95% confidence interval and 0.05 p-value.

RESULTS

There were a total of 396 students who participated in the survey. The majority of the students were from field of engineering numbering 199(50.3%), followed by Arts Numbering 83(21%), Commerce 54(13.6%), BSc 60(15%).

Among the students, only 79 (19.9%) were aware that hepatitis C was a viral disease while 166(41.9 %) thought that it was bacterial. The number of students who were aware that it is spread via unscreened blood was 275(69.4%) and that it is spread via sharing needles were 320 (80.8%). Regarding the prevention of hepatitis C, 296 (74.7%) knew that it was preventable while 281

(71%) thought that a vaccine existed for prevention of Hepatitis C.

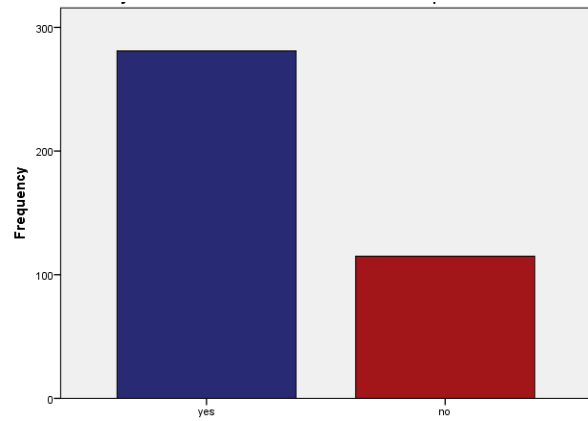


Figure No.1: Percentage of students who do or do not believe that a vaccine for hepatitis C is available

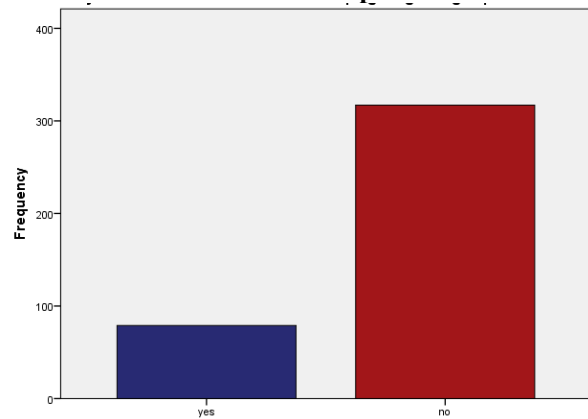


Figure No.2: Percentage of students who have or have not ever attended a seminar regarding hepatitis C

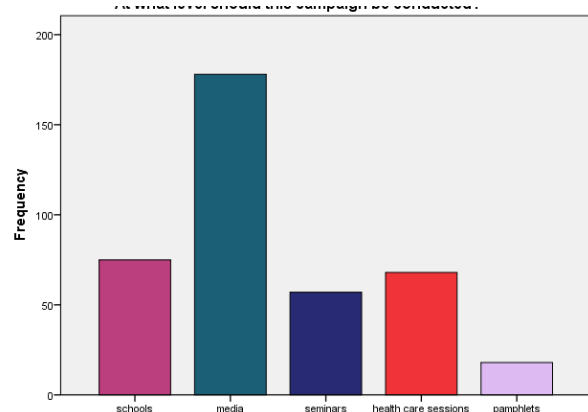


Figure No.3: Students' opinions on what level future campaigns against hepatitis C should be conducted

252(63.6%) Students ensured that new syringes were used by the hospital staff whenever they visited hospital. 250 (63.1%) ensured that sterilized instruments were used during dental checkup. 299 (75%) made sure that new blades were used in hair

dressing salons.333 (84%)responded that they would not marry a Hepatitis C infected person. 145 (36.6%) students thought that the infected should be isolated from others. A majority 317(80%) had not attended a Hepatitis C Awareness Seminar.

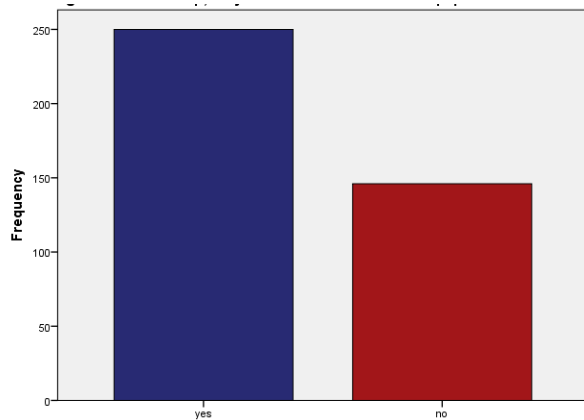


Figure No.4: Percentage of students who ensure that sterilized equipment is used during their dental check-up.

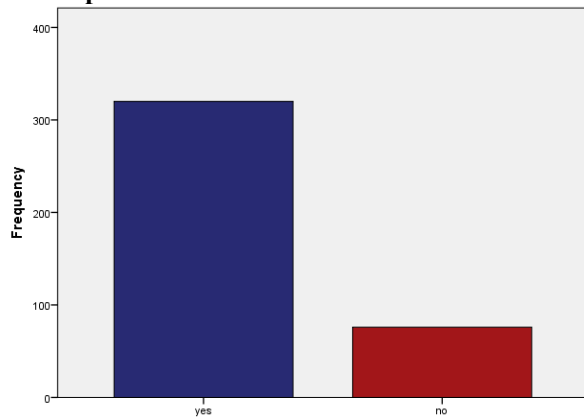


Figure No.5: Percentage of students who know that hepatitis C is spread through used needles.

DISCUSSION

Hepatitis C has created a crisis which has only served to increase the financial burden and create social stigmas in our society. In Pakistan the use of unsterilized needles in medical institutes, the transfusion of unscreened blood, widespread drug abuse and the lack of proper sterilization in dental surgeries have led to an increase in its occurrence¹¹. The chronicity of the disease increases the morbidity and mortality. It puts the underprivileged patients at a disadvantage and an increased risk of developing cirrhosis since the only care they can avail are the public health services.¹² Moreover, hepatitis C may also cause social issues such as isolation, marital problems and a need for lifestyle modifications.¹³ This growing crisis requires intervention at a preventive level which can only be achieved if the public is educated about the disease.

The study found a dominance of the students that had adequate knowledge about the modes of transmission of hepatitis C. The number of students who were aware that it is spread via unsterilized blood was 275(69.4%) and that it is spread via sharing needles were 320 (80.8%). Regarding the prevention of hepatitis C, 296 (74.7%) knew that it was preventable. The Similar Findings Were Confirmed by a Study Conducted In Quetta In Pakistan in 2010 ¹⁴. The Study showed The only 79 (19.9%) were aware that hepatitis C was a viral disease while 166(41.9 %) thought that it was bacterial. This misconception displays a gap in the basic knowledge of the disease.¹⁵ 281 (71%) thought that a vaccine existed for prevention of Hepatitis C. This Misconception was supported earlier by another study conducted in Karachi in 2010 where 60% students had responded that such a vaccine existed.¹⁶ 252(63.6%) Students ensured that new syringes were used by the hospital staff whenever they visited hospital. 250 (63.1%) ensured that sterilized instruments were used during dental checkup. Majority Of Non Medical Students also Took Similar Precautions According To A study Conducted In Egypt in 2013. ¹⁷ 299(75%) made sure that new blades were used in hair dressing salons. This was Similar to a Study conducted in Hyderabad where the percentage of students who ensured that sterilized equipment was used was higher yet those who asked for new blades in salons were much lower than the ones totaled in this study.¹⁸ 333 (84%) responded that they would not marry a Hepatitis C infected person. Similar Mindset was demonstrated by Non Medical University Students Who were approached in a Study conducted in Egypt.¹⁹ The study showed that145 (36.6%) students thought that the infected should be isolated from others.²⁰

The participants were also asked about to campaigns regarding hepatitis C to which a large majority answered that they had never been exposed to such measures. The Study showed that A majority 317(80%) Non Medical University Students had not attended a Hepatitis C Awareness Seminar. The participants were also found to be eager get opportunities where they would be educated about hepatitis C with media campaigning to be the most popular choice among them.

CONCLUSION

The results of this survey showed that the level of awareness, the attitudes and practices regarding hepatitis C among non-medical university students is less than satisfactory. The survey highlighted significant gaps in knowledge that might lead to unsafe practices, however the majority of the students do not seem to be in any direct danger of contracting hepatitis C. these gaps in knowledge might be overcome by introducing basic health care in school curriculums and assigning

health care workers by the government to educate the general public.

Author's Contribution:

Concept & Design of Study: Faheem Ahmad
 Drafting: Tafazzul H Zaidi
 Data Analysis: Kiran Mehtab
 Revisiting Critically: Faheem Ahmad,
 Tafazzul H Zaidi
 Final Approval of version: Faheem Ahmad

Conflict of Interest: The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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