



Evaluation of Awareness and Preventive Measures among Transgender Regarding Sexually Transmitted Diseases

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ABSTRACT: Sexually transmitted diseases are infectious disorders spread through unsafe sexual contact among sex workers and transgender community. The present study was conducted to evaluate awareness and preventive measures among male transgender in transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STD). It was a descriptive cross-sectional survey study that conducted in Lahore, Pakistan. After informed consent the data was collected using the snowball sampling technique for 6 months. 41 transgender including all types of age ranging 18-45 years were included as per convenience. A self-administered survey-based questionnaire was developed using WHO and CDC guidelines. Data were analyzed with the help of the (SPSS) version 22 for the descriptive statistics. The mean age was 29.8 ± 7.09 with the highest age of 45 and lowest 18. Regarding education majority of the transgender were dropped out at Middle 18(43.9%) and 9(22%) were illiterate. The highest frequency among professionals were of dancers 17(41.5%) and sex workers 11(26.8%). A Majority 28(68.3%) has unsafe sexual contact with one or more partners. Some have experienced discharge from urethra 14(20.3%), pain during urination 18(26.1%), ulcers or sores in genital areas 6(8.7%) altogether which can be a symptom of STD. About 24(58%) transgender practices self-medication without the prescription of a medical physician. It was concluded that transgender have a poor understanding of STDs due to low education and sex selling as a profession. They engage in risky sexual behaviour and were found unaware of proper treatment resources.

Keyword: Transgender, Sex workers, STD, HIV, Awareness, Prevention

INTRODUCTION

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infectious disorders spread through unsafe sexual contact among sex workers and the transgender community (Collumbien et al., 2008). These diseases are caused by the transmission of viruses, bacteria, fungus, parasites, protozoa, or arthropods from one person to another through unsafe sexual means (Khan et al., 2008; Aral et al., 2011). There are about 30 known different pathologies or conditions formed due to sexual contact are Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Genital Herpes, Syphilis, Hepatitis, Trichomoniasis, Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) (Khan et al., 2013; Van Gerwen et al., 2020). It is common in the transgender community because the majority of them are receptive partners in anal intercourse (Ejaz et al., 2022). Previous researchers have found that HIV and STD incidence is nineteen times higher among transgender sex workers (Hawkes et al., 2009). They are more likely to have their anal lining burst and get infected (Landers et al., 2015; John et al., 2021). STDs are one of the world's most important public health challenges affecting both developed and

developing countries (Van Gerwen et al., 2020). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) more than one million individuals globally get a sexually transmitted illness every day and 500 million people each year including Transgender and other identities as the third gender. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have a significant influence on sexual and reproductive health around the world (WHO, 2013; Williamson et al., 2020). Every day, almost one million STDs are acquired. WHO estimates that 374 million new infections with commonly four sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) were expected to be occur in 2020 as chlamydia (129 million), gonorrhea (82 million), syphilis (7.1 million), and trichomoniasis (7.1 million) (Barrow et al., 2020; Hsieh et al., 2022). The most serious viral STD is human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which leads to AIDS and incurable (Mayer et al., 2011). Human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B, and genital herpes are among the other incurable viral STDs which is affecting Transgender health (Khan et al., 2011; Ejaz et al., 2022). A study in Karachi Pakistan showed the prevalence of STDs among Pakistani males was determined to be 4.4 percent and Sexually-acquired infections (SAIs)

were prevalent in 60 percent of Transgender and 36 percent of commercial sex workers (Aijaz and Mehraj, 2020).

Due to a lack of legal rights, prejudice, and intolerance in Pakistani society, transgender people are forced to work as sex workers, dancers at weddings and celebrations, blessing babies, and begging on the streets (Tabassum and Jamil 2014; Manzoor et al., 2022). Transgender receive more money and customers to engage in unprotected intercourse increases the risk of contracting sexually transmitted disease (Ramanathan et al., 2014; Minget al., 2016). As a result the consideration of money and customer pleasure makes it difficult to persuade them to use condoms (Abbas et al., 2014; Budhwani et al., 2017). Transgender face stigma and discrimination in health care, educational and housing facilities which are significantly linked to a rise in increased sexual behaviour and actions towards sex work (John et al., 2021; Manzoor et al., 2022). They lack knowledge about awareness and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases which eventually raise the risk of contracting the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Sahastrabudde et al., 2012).

This study was conducted to evaluate the awareness and prevention knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases. The Transgender involved in sex work described the transmission of diseases associated with their sexual behaviour. This Survey has highlighted the effects of sex selling, lack of knowledge, unavailability of health resources among the transgender population in Pakistan. This research have also importance in the development of successful transgender prevention and treatment programs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is a Descriptive Cross-sectional Survey conducted in Lahore, Pakistan. A sample size of 41 was considered as per convenience. The data was collected using the Snowball Sampling technique for 6 months. The transgender included all type a gender, androgynous, bigender, pangender, gender fluid etc. The age group of 18 to 50 years were included after taking informed consent. A self-administered survey-based questionnaire was developed using WHO and CDC guidelines followed and pilot tested from 10 health experts.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analysed with the help of the (SPSS) version 22. Descriptive statistics about age were calculated. The frequencies and percentages were

mentioned as the response of the question.

RESULTS

Transgender is the socially unprivileged population in Pakistan and lacks basic facilities and necessities of life. This study was planned to visualize a lack of knowledge and awareness about sexual transmitted diseases. The data obtained from the formal questionnaire was based on important variables i.e. age, profession and qualification of Transgender. The inclusion age was 18 to 45 in which the mean age was 29.8 ± 7.09 with the highest age 45 and lowest 18.

Professions of transgender were included as sex workers, dancer and blessing birth and beggars as mentioned in table 2 the educational qualifications were categorized into Illiterate, Middle, Matric, Intermediate and bachelors. The majority of the transgender were school and college dropped outs as Middle 18(43.9%) Matric 10(24.4%), 9(22%) were illiterate had no basic education and very few of them as 3(7.3%) and 1(2.4%) had intermediate and bachelors (table 1). Table 1 showed the highest frequency of dancers as 17(41.5%), following sex workers 11(26.8) with lowest as blessing birth 9(22%) and begging 4(9.8%).

Table 1: Education level and Profession of Transgender

Education of transgender	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Bachelors	01	2.4	2.4	2.4
Intermediate	03	7.3	7.3	9.8
Matric	10	24.4	24.4	34.1
Middle	18	43.9	43.9	78.0
Illiterate	09	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	
Professions of transgender				
Sex workers	11	26.8	26.8	26.8
Dancers	17	41.5	41.5	68.3
Blessing births	09	22.0	22.0	90.2
Begging	04	9.8	9.8	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	

The response towards knowledge and awareness of STDs as the majority of them were totally unaware of all types of STD's following HPV, 30(73.2%), 38(92.7%), 38(92.7%) genital herpes, 35(85.4%) syphilis, 33(80.5%) trichomoniasis, 34(82.9%) gonorrhoea, 27(65.9%) chlamydia whereas very few of them were aware of hepatitis as 24(58.5%) and HIV as 18(43.9%).

Table 2: Awareness of transgender regarding STDs

Which of the following sexually transmitted disease you are aware of?	Yes N (%)	No N (%)
1. Human Papillomavirus (HPV)	11(26.8)	30(73.2)
2. Genital Herpes	3(7.3)	38(92.7)
3. Syphilis	6(14.6)	35(85.4)
4. Hepatitis	24(58.5)	17(41.5)
5. Trichomoniasis	8(19.5)	33(80.5)
6. Gonorrhea	7 (17.1)	34(82.9)
7. Chlamydia	14 (34.1)	27(65.9)
8. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)	18(43.9)	23(56.1)

The sexual practice of transgender shown 28(68.3%) have unsafe sexual contact with one or more partners and avoid using condoms because of customer pleasure and satisfaction (table 3).

Table 3: Response of Transgender regarding sexual practice, signs and symptoms and treatment approach

Do you wear a condom and practice safe sex for the prevention of STDs?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	13	31.7	31.7	31.7
No	28	68.3	68.3	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	
Do you have any signs and symptoms Regarding sexually transmitted diseases?				
Discharge from urethra	14	20.3	20.3	20.3
Pain during urination	18	26.1	26.1	46.4
Ulcers/sores in the genital area	6	8.7	8.7	55.1
Never Experienced	31	44.9	44.9	100.0
Total	69	100.0	100.0	
If you or your fellow transgender needed treatment for sexually transmitted disease where they could approach it?				
Local pharmacy	24	58.5	58.5	58.5
Govt. Hospital/Health-care facility	12	29.3	29.3	87.8
Private doctor / nurse/ clinic	5	12.2	12.2	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	
Do you believe that STD awareness and Prevention programs could improve the quality of life in Transgender?				
Yes	34	82.9	82.9	82.9
No	7	17.1	17.1	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	

The questions were asked from transgender about their experience having any of these symptoms some of them had experienced as discharge from

urethra 14(20.3%), pain during urination 18(26.1%), ulcers or sores in genital areas 6(8.7%), some had all symptoms together and considered in frequency. About 31 (44.9%) have no symptoms and have never experienced it (Table 3). The response of transgender towards their treatment regarding symptoms about STDs was calculated as 24(58%) visited the pharmacy and asked for medicine from the salesman and use them without prescription of medical physician, 12(29.3%) visited Government Hospital while 5(12%) visited private doctor or nurse in a clinic (Table 3). The response from the transgender population was considered for the future interventions that did they believe awareness and prevention programs can improve their quality of life 34(82.9%) were sure and responded in favour of more awareness and prevention programs towards the marginalized and socially discriminated population (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The current study was conducted to evaluate awareness and prevention regarding STD transmission among transgender in Lahore, Pakistan. Moreover, the researcher was interested in exploring the important factors like profession and qualifications contributing towards transgender health

status. The researcher has evaluated the factors with the help of self-administered survey-based questionnaires based on evaluation regarding knowledge of STDs including symptoms and medication. STDs is transmitted through sexual contact with an infected person and is caused due to HPV, HIV, Hepatitis B virus etc. Sexually transmitted disease occurs usually because of the ruptured lining of the penis and rectum. The transgender have less knowledge about transmission, causes, signs and symptoms and do not know accurate treatment plans.

The current study found that the maximum number of transgender is totally unaware of all types of STD's. The respondents had negative responses as 30(73.2) HPV, 38(92.7%), 38 (92.7) Genital herpes, 35(85.4%) Syphilis, 33(80.5%) Trichomoniasis, 34(82.9%) Gonorrhoea, 27(65.9%) Chlamydia, whereas very few of them were aware of hepatitis as 24(58.5) and HIV as 18(43.9%). A study by Ejaz et al. (2022) conducted to study male and transgender sex workers who had genital warts and anal cancer due to sexually transmitted human papillomavirus infection. The previous study evaluated knowledge, risk perceptions about STDs including HPV beliefs and attitudes towards HPV

prevention, and recommendation of participants for HPV vaccination and anal pap screening. The current study has also evaluated that transgender were unaware of the human Papilloma virus and may have a higher risk of genital warts and anal cancer. The participants described lack of knowledge of HPV and its health consequences. The current study was planned to visualize lack of knowledge and awareness about sexual transmitting diseases and found similar results. The preventive measures such as condom use are fewer in both studies. They preferred to have unsafe sexual contact without a condom for customer satisfaction.

A systemic review by Van Gerwen et al. (2020) and accessed the prevalence of HIV and STIs among both transgender and reviewed 25 studies which represented 11 countries. HIV was the most often investigated STD, with prevalence rates ranging from 0% to 49.6% in transgender women and 0% to 8.3 percent in transgender men. The review had comparable perspectives and conclusions were studied about the indications and symptoms, as well as their frequency of getting infection while having unsafe sex. The current study has focused on the symptoms that some of them experienced discharge from urethra 14(20.3%), pain during

urination 18(26.1%), ulcers or sores in genital areas. Some had all symptoms together and considered in frequency. About 31 (44.9%) have no symptoms and never experience it. The review also mentioned that the transgender suffered discharge from the urethra and pain during urination, which is a sign of sexually transmitted disease. The current study also asked for symptoms and the frequency of symptoms of occurrence as 31(75%) have never experienced any symptoms while 7(17.1%) experienced once and only 3 (7.3%) had more than once, which was related with the systematic review and shows the frequency of first and repeated infection.

In the current scenario, the transgender have faced sexual abuse, social discrimination and regional marginalization which are forcing them towards sex selling. The current study also explains the sexual practice of transgender which is shown as 28(68.3%) have unsafe sexual contact with one or more partners and avoid using condoms because of customer pleasure and satisfaction, Whereas Khan et al. (2013) looked at the role of Hijras (Male transgender) and found that (58%) had sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) and (38% had multiple infections). Syphilis (50 percent) and

gonorrhoea (18 percent), which were the most common infections, corresponded to current survey findings that they were oblivious of knowledge and transmission. Both the studies found that transmission of an STD can be due to multiple partners and frequent use of condoms.

Transgender from Lahore, Pakistan were also studied by Manzoor et al. (2022) and used a snow-ball sampling technique to include 214 samples. They represented major health issues such as depression (56 percent), anxiety (59 percent), and genital tract ulcers (45 percent). About 70% of transsexual people seek treatment at government hospitals. Whereas a current study found that 24(58%) visited the local pharmacy and got medicine without a prescription from a medical physician and 12(29.3%) visited Government Hospital and 5(12.7%) visited a private doctor or nurse in a clinic. Previous and current studies related to find that the transgender community faces physical, mental, social and reproductive health issues. About 70% of transgender receive poor quality health care services. Non-acceptance, feeling ashamed and non-affordability has been reported as major barriers to getting desired health care. The transgender community was examined for future interventions in

response to their opinions, and they feel that awareness and preventive initiatives can improve their quality of life, and they say to enrich them with prevention and awareness programmes for effective STD control.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that lack of education among transgender people causes a poor understanding of Sexually Transmitted Diseases. According to the findings, they earn money by begging, dancing, selling sex and blessing births. They engage in unsafe sexual contracts while being aware of the available protection for condom use. Their understanding of indications and symptoms, as well as the availability of treatment clinics is very limited depending on self-medication. Transgender people have urged that health issues such as STDs, including HIV, should be addressed through information and awareness campaigns.

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