Evaluation of communication channels about sexually transmitted infections among Tirana University students

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Abstract

Aims: Different communication channels as interpersonal communication, the transmission channels (radio, television, and internet) and printed materials must be considered for influencing knowledge, attitudes and practices about health. Our aim was to assess the communication channels about sexually transmitted infections at Tirana University students in order to identify appropriate channels to deliver health-related messages.

Methods: A structured self-administered questionnaire was used to collect information from a representative sample of 557 students, representing 27646 students at Tirana University.

Results: Discussion on issues related to sexuality (including STIs) remains still taboo for young people. Thus, students reported that they have discussed more with peers, 49.9%, followed by partner 31.8%, mother 27.5%, siblings 26.8%, health personnel 13.1%, teachers 12.9% and fathers 5.2%. The internet was a main source of information of our respondents, reported by 66.4% of them, followed by television (63.7%), newspapers/books/brochures (55.1%), friends (42.7%), teachers (41.5%), parents (41.3 %), health personnel (26.9%), partner (23.7%), and social worker/psychologist (14.7%).

Conclusions: Television and internet are the two most followed and preferred media by students and should be used in promotional campaigns for conveying health messages. Selection of specific media, based on the audience and the peak hours, must be considered for delivering health-related key messages.

Key words: communication channels, Internet, sexually transmitted infections, students, television.

Introduction

Health communication channels are different: interpersonal communication channels, which are good to give credibility to the message, the transmission channels such as radio, television, the internet, offering wide coverage and reaching a large number of audience quickly and print materials such as leaflets, brochures, posters, etc., which provide a timely reminder messages.

Media is an important ally of public health with its role as a source of accurate information, and an advocate for fair health behaviors. Local and national media play a vital role as a link between health personnel and the general public. Health authorities should educate media with substantial and scientific health information, which then must be passed to the public in the appropriate form and through a variety of channels (1).

During the work with media, the following factors should be carefully considered: a) the channels through which messages are forwarded, b) audience to which is attributed the message, c) how the audience responses, d) selecting messages with greater impact. These considerations reflect the essential components of the communication process: communication channel, the source, the message and the receiver of the message (2).

In the field of public health has been given more importance to the use of media (radio, TV, newspapers, books, brochures) to modify the attitudes and practices to persuade audiences to protect their health. Today, internet is a competitive media that is moving faster (3). With the popularity of the internet as an innovation, more and more young people are using it to get health information. Peers are also an important communication channel, based on the idea that they have a strong influence to each other's behavior (4).

The purpose of this study is to assess the communication channels of Tirana University students about sexually transmitted infections, in order to find the most appropriate channels for conveying health messages to this target group.

Methodology

The collection of the information was done from a sample of 557 students, representative of 27646 students (20028 females [72.5%] and 7618 males [27.5%]), selected randomly and proportional to size (5,6) from the number of University students (stratified by faculties). Data on the number of students by faculty was pulled from official statistics of the Ministry of Education. The proportion of the students in each University and Faculty was determined and then, in each University the students were randomly selected proportional to size. For example, if the University of Tirana comprised 40% of all university students, then 40% of our sample would also be selected from the Tirana University. Power of the study was set at 80% whereas the significance level (type 1 or alpha error) was set at 5 % (0.05). Based conservative assumptions, it resulted that the minimum sample size to detect the differences was 470. We decided to interview more students in order to increase the study power. Data collection instrument was a self-structured questionnaire, which was previously pretested with a similar group of 50 students (5). Data entry and data analysis was done in SPSS format, version16.0.

Results and Discussion

We analyzed a total number of 557 questionnaires, 404 of which were females and 153 were males. Some of the main results obtained from the data analysis of these questionnaires are as follows:

The students were specifically asked to report if they had discussion on the STIs. The analysis of data on this issue concluded that they discuss very often with peers (friends) which occupied the highest percentage of cases 49.9%. Respondents then reported partner by 31.8%, mother 27.5%, sister / brother 26.8%, health personnel 13.1%, teachers 12.9%, psychologist / social worker 7.5% and father only 5.2%. As in other studies conducted among youths, peers are more reliable group than other to discuss such issues related to sexuality, including STIs. On the other hand, the medical staff was less preferred to discuss these issues with them, compared with other groups, Table 1.

Table 1. With whom do you discuss about STIs?

Do you discuss about STIs with:	Yes, often	Yes, rarely	No
Your mother?	153 (27.5)[*]	164 (29.4)	240 (43.1)
Your father?	29 (5.2)	88 (15.8)	440 (79.0)
Your partner?	177 (31.8)	114 (20.4)	266 (47.8)
Your friend?	278 (49.9)	188 (33.8)	91 (16.3)
Health personnel?	73 (13.1)	126 (22.6)	358 (64.3)
Your teacher?	72 (12.9)	248 (44.5)	237 (42.5)
Psichologist/social worker?	42 (7.5)	90 (16.2)	425 (76.3)

* Absolute numbers and row percentages (in parenthesis).

In response to a question on learning at school on STIs only 8.1% of participants responded negatively, while 87.6% of them report that they have been talking and discussing about it at school. But, on the other hand, 32.5% of them say that have been talking only for HIV/ AIDS as one of STIs.

Another question that students were asked was if they watch the television, listen to the radio, read newspapers/ magazines or uses the internet. They reported that the internet is the media more used from them with 97.3% positive responses (66.8% use often and 30.5% use occasionally or rarely) [Table 2].

Table 2. Do you use the Internet to get health information**?**

Do you use the Internet to get health information?	Number	Percentage
Yes	372	66.8
No	15	2.7
Occasionally	154	27.6
Very rarely	16	2.9
Total	*557*	*100.0*

A significant number of respondents, 93.9%, reported television (81.0% often and 12.9% rare) as the media followed by them (Table 3). More of half of them 57.3% read newspapers or magazines and 56.6% listen to the radio (38.6% often and 18% often).

Table 3. Do you use television to get health information?

Do you use television to get health information?	Number	Percentage
Yes	451	81.0
No	34	6.1
Yes, rarely	72	12.9

The data above go in the same line with the answers below given by students regarding the source of information on STIs.

So, the largest source of information on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), for our students has been the internet, which responded positively to the 66.4% of respondents, followed by television (63.7%) newspapers/ books/ brochures (55.1%), friend (42,7%), teacher (41.5%), parents (41.3%), health personnel (26.9%), partner/wife (23.7%) and the social worker/psychologist (14.7%). Data above

noted that the Internet is being used increasingly by our students and health staff is estimated to be a poor source of information on STIs. Also, from the analysis of the data found a positive correlation between parental education and the level of discussion with them about STIs.

Regarding the media that the students would prefer to receive information on STIs, television was ranked first with 65.5%, of the respondents followed by the Internet with 59.8%, books 50.6%, magazines 27.3%, schools 7.7 %, health personnel

7%, parents 1.8% and psychologist 0.4%. Consistently, health personnel again remain less preferred to receive information on STIs.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study confirmed results of previous investigations that discussion on issues related to sexuality including STIs remains still taboo for young people in Albania. Also, the findings indicate the importance of peer-educator methods and parental involvement in implementing various educational programs for health communication regarding this target group.

Internet as an innovation is being used increasingly by our students. Television and the Internet are the two more followed and preferred media to obtain health information, followed by newspapers, magazines and radio. These media should be widely used in various campaigns to monitor the health messages. Selecting specific media based on the students' audience and the peak hours pursued by them, are two other important aspects that must be considered when selecting these media as channels for the transmission of messages related to sexuality and STIs.

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