

Knowledge of College Girls on Child Health

N. Ganga

Female literacy, one component of GOBIFFF, is an important factor in reducing the infant mortality rate. Educated mothers are expected to have better awareness and easy acceptability of an advice given. This study was undertaken in Kumbakonam, an industrial town in Tamilnadu to assess the knowledge of college girls regarding their awareness of antenatal and childhood immunizations, breast feeding, weaning, oral rehydration solution (ORS) and feeding during diarrhea.

Material and Methods

The study included 384 (201 Science, 183 Arts) final year college girls. After obtaining a verbal consent they were requested to answer a closed-ended questionnaire covering basic health components like antenatal and childhood immunizations, breast feeding, weaning, oral rehydration solution and feeding during diarrhea.

From the Government College for Women, Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu.

Reprint requests: Dr. N. Ganga, C/o Dr. A. Subramanian, Sacred Heart Leprosy Centre, Sakkottai 612 001, Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu.

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Results

One hundred and eleven (28.9%) girls were from rural area, 69 (17.9%) from semi-urban and 204 (53.2%) from urban area. Despite the fact that questions were based on messages spread through mass media, especially Television, the awareness was poor. The awareness was similar in students from rural semi-urban and urban areas. The results were as shown in *Table I*.

Antenatal Immunizations

Three hundred and forty one (88.8%) did not know the purpose and 111 (28.9%) the number of doses to be given, though 353 (91.9%) knew that it should be given. They thought that immunizations during pregnancy is to prevent abortion, to prevent congenital anomalies, to prevent diseases in mother and child, for easy delivery, for better growth of the child and for better health of the mother.

Childhood Immunizations

Three hundred and seventy seven (88.1%) knew that immunizations are to be given to a child. Only 22 (5.7%) knew the usefulness and doses of the same. They consider that immunizations are for better health of a child and they prevent jaundice, night blindness, brain fever, pneumonia, malaria, cholera and stroke. Eight (2.1%) girls felt that immunizations are to be given to a child every week till the child is 5 years old. Eight (2.1%) girls felt that children may not tolerate immunizations.

All girls know that breast feeding was good. Five (1.3%) knew that breast feeding improves mother infant bonding and prevents malignancy of breast. They were of the view that breast milk improves digestion of other food given, prevents malaria, smallpox, abdominal tumor and blindness.

TABLE I—Awareness of Girls on Issues of Basic Child Health

Parameter	Correct No. (%)	Incorrect No. (%)	No response No. (%)
<i>Antenatal immunization</i>			
Purpose	12 (3.1)	341 (88.8)	31 (8.1)
Doses	273 (71.1)	111 (28.9)	-
Childhood immunization	22 (5.7)	355 (92.4)	7 (1.9)
Advantages of breast feeding	278 (72.9)	96 (25)	10 (2.1)
<i>Weaning</i>			
Age	306 (79.7)	44 (11.5)	34 (8.8)
Foods	262 (68.2)	60 (15.6)	62 (16.2)
Oral rehydration solution	287 (82.4)	56 (7)	41 (10.6)
Diet during childhood diarrhea	241 (62.8)	126 (32.8)	17 (4.4)

Seventy three per cent knew that breast milk has more nutritive value and the ability to prevent common infections.

Eighty per cent girls knew that weaning has to be initiated before child is 6 months old. Sixty eight per cent were able to tell the cheap, nutritive, locally available weaning foods. Thirty per cent girls believed that weaning with artificial foods including biscuits were good.

Eighty two per cent of girls knew about ORS. Eleven girls wanted to give only sugar water and 9 girls wanted to give only salt water. Thirty seven per cent girls wanted to feed the child as usual during diarrhea and 32.8% girls wanted to starve the child.

Discussion

Despite the fact that questions were based on message spread through mass media, especially television, the awareness was poor. They did not know the vernacular terms for the vaccine preventable diseases. In an earlier study educated parents were

unaware of protective value of immunization(1). The availability and benefits of ORS was known to most girls. In an earlier study, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives and nursing students were not fully aware of feeding during diarrheal diseases(2).

Though female literacy is stated to be a definite factor in reducing infant mortality rate, the knowledge on basic child health is poor among college girls. In order to ensure child survival, the message must be spread from the school level itself. As per one study, girls trained as teachers, did not possess adequate knowledge about infant feeding(3).

Health personnel should explain the benefits of immunizations, breast feeding, weaning, ORS and feeding during diarrhea. Local health personnel may be involved in educating the public and students regarding basic health principles.

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