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# The prevalence of risky sexual behaviours amongst undergraduate students in Jigjiga University, Ethiopia

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 19 February 2015

Accepted 2 November 2015

### Keywords:

Condom use

Risky sex

Sexual behaviour

Sexual partners

Students

## ABSTRACT

Young adults including university students are at high risk of acquiring HIV due to their risky sexual practices. The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours amongst regular undergraduate students in Jigjiga University. The researcher used a quantitative, univariate cross-sectional descriptive study. Two hundred and thirty six (236) students were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a standardised structured questionnaire. The study revealed that 70.53% of respondents were sexually experienced. Majority (54.8%) of the sexually experienced respondents were sexually active within 3 months of the study. Up to 30.14% of sexually experienced respondents have had sex with a person other than their current partner in the past 12 months. Only 59.6% of the sexually experienced respondents used condom in their most recent sexual engagement. The findings of this study showed that university students are involved in sexual behaviours that may increase their risk of contracting HIV infection. Based on the above results, researchers recommended the designing of interventions which are contextually relevant to Jigjiga University to mitigate risky sexual practices amongst university students.

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## 1. Introduction

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection has been one of the top health related challenges for the past three decades. This is especially imperative for the African nations which bear 67% of the world's HIV/AIDS burden (World Health Organisation WHO, 2010). Risky sexual behaviours contribute to the high HIV prevalence in Africa (Cherie &

Berhane, 2012). Studies indicate that young adults, including college students are at high risk of contracting HIV due to their risky sexual practices (Cherie & Berhane, 2012). The contributory factor to the high risky sexual behaviour is technological transitions, which make it easier to distribute sexual information from more liberal to more conservative societies (WHO, 2006). Other factors contributing to sexual risky behaviours according to Graham (2012) include peer pressure, unlicensed erotic films, drugs and alcohol abuse. Moreover,

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Peer review under responsibility of Johannesburg University.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hsag.2015.11.002>

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advances in contraceptives have freed sexual expression from its reproductive consequences (Elizabeth & Imo, 2008).

Studies have also showed that sexual risky behaviours such as early sexual debut in Ethiopia are still high. About 40.6% of in-school youths who have had sexual experience started sex before the age of 15 years (Seme & Wirtu, 2008). According to the Ministry of Health: HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (HAPCO 2005), approximately 61.3% youth were sexually active within the preceding 12 months of a Behavioural Surveillance Survey round II. From the total number of respondents in the Behavioural Surveillance Survey round II survey, 22.7% (31.2% males and 2.7% females) had more than one sexual partner (HAPCO 2005). Nevertheless, there was slight increase in the median age of sexual debut from 17.3 years in 2000 to 18.5 years in 2005 among females and from 18.7 years to 20.5 years among males (Suzuki et al. 2008).

Sexual behaviour needs to take a central position in the heart of public health policy makers and researchers. This is important in view of its association with Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV. This is more important in the African continent because it comprises 13% of the world population, and bears 67% of the world's HIV/AIDS burden (Maticka, 2012). Though the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is declining in Ethiopia (3.5% in 2005 to 1.5% in 2011), the country is still one of the hardest hit in the continent of Africa (HAPCO, 2012). The age specific prevalence of HIV in Ethiopia shows that people between the ages 20–29 are the most infected (Central Statistical Agency and International Coach Federation International, 2012). HIV in Africa including Ethiopia is primarily transmitted heterosexually due to risky sexual behaviours such as premarital sex, having concurrent multiple sexual partners, and transactional sex. These behaviours are also prevalent amongst college students. Shefer, Clowes, and Vergnani (2012) also reported that 25% of Ethiopian students are exposed to at least one sexual risk behaviours.

The high rate of premarital sex and having multiple sexual partners among college students are usually associated with non-condom use (Tilahun, Assefa, & Belachew, 2010). Although multiple interventions in schools in Ethiopia have been successful in increasing knowledge, attitude and perception (KAP) related to condoms, few have resulted in increased correct and consistent use of condoms (Higgins & Cooper, 2012). Furthermore, Gulliksen and Audensen (2013) indicated that enrolment in higher education institutions in Ethiopia has increased by 120% since 2008. However, studies on sexual behaviour among college students in general in Ethiopia are scanty (HAPCO, 2012; Lewis, Blayney, Lostutter, & Kilmer, 2012). The objective of this study was to determine the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours amongst undergraduate students at Jigjiga University in Ethiopia.

## 2. Research methods and design

This quantitative univariate cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted to determine the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours amongst undergraduate students at Jigjiga University. Jigjiga University is one of 31 public universities in Ethiopia. For 2010/2011 academic year, the university had

enrolled a total of 7480 regular students (Jigjiga University 2010). Simple random sampling method was employed. The sampling frame information was provided by the Jigjiga University Registrar's Office upon fulfilling all the ethical requirements. Only students who met inclusion criteria were allowed to participate. The inclusion criterion for this study was being a regular undergraduate student within the age range of 18–25 years and in the graduating class at Jigjiga University. Students in the summer and/or extension programme of the university as well as those in a regular programme, but not in their graduating class in the 2013/14 academic year were excluded. A total of 236 students were randomly selected by computer using a simple random selection approach. The sample size of this study was determined using the following formula  $n = \frac{z_{\alpha/2}^2(p(1-p))}{d^2}$ . Based on assumption of prevalence of in-school youth premarital sex of 9.9% from the Ethiopian round two Behavioural Surveillance Survey (HAPCO 2005), 95% level of confidence corresponded to  $z_{\alpha/2} = 1.96$ , with statistical power of 90%, 4% margin of error, and 10% non-response rate gave a sample size of 236.

Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was partially developed by the researchers. Some aspects of the questionnaire were adapted from the 2011 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey tool and Behavioural surveillance Survey round two. The research questionnaire comprised of two sections. Section A contained questions on demographic characteristics of the participants. Section B contained questions on sexual behaviours of the participants. Questions on sexual behaviours included premarital sex, multiple sexual partners, condom use and sexual activities in association with substance use. The questionnaire was piloted on ten students of similar profile with respondents at another university. Their comments were included in the final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested and assessed against a set of criteria such as time taken to complete, difficulty in understanding the essence of ideas and the presence of any emotionally burdening questions.

A self-reporting data collection method was used as it is difficult to gather information related to sexuality and sexual behaviours. Two lecturers from the department of health at Jigjiga University helped the researchers during data collection. At the time of administering the research questionnaire to each participant, clarification on any difficulties were made. Explanations on words like sex, age of sexual debut and the skip patterns was provided to each respondent. Respondents were provided with a locked box with an opening into which they put all completed questionnaires. This was done to ensure anonymity and also to reduce social desirability bias. For data analysis, the researchers used Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, v.16). Descriptive statistical procedures such as tables, graphs and proportions were used to report and describe findings.

## 3. Ethical consideration

Ethical principles of beneficence, respect for human dignity and justice highlighted in Polit and Beck (2008) were employed throughout the study. Ethical clearance and approval of the

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