

‘KNOWLEDGE’ AND ‘ATTITUDE’ OF PRE-SERVICE
TEACHERS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA TOWARDS
SEXUALLY TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS (STIs) AND
OTHER BLOOD-BORNE VIRUSES (BBVs)

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Glossary of Terms

Sexually transmissible/transmitted infections (STIs) Invasion of and multiplication in bodily tissue by a microorganism (e.g., bacterium, virus, protozoan) that is usually (more than half the time) passed from one person to another during intimate bodily contact meant to give or derive sexual gratification (Shuford, 2008, para. 2).

Sexually transmissible/transmitted diseases (STDs) Pathology (i.e., damage) with or without symptoms secondary to an infection that is usually (more than half the time) passed from one person to another during intimate bodily contact meant to give or derive sexual gratification (Shuford, 2008, para. 3).

Note: According to Shuford (2008, para. 1), these terms are often confused but they are not inter-changeable with sexually transmissible/transmitted infection being the broadest term. She further asserted that “all STDs are STIs, but not all STIs are STDs”. Hence, the acquisition of infection (or the pathogenic organism) can be referred to as a STI, whereas a disease manifestation (part of the body malfunctioning because of a STI) is a STD (Fitch & Cox, 2005). Therefore, throughout the thesis, these terms are used as fitting to the context and not interchangeably as suggested by Shuford. This also justified the title of the study as incorporating the term ‘STIs’ and not STDs.

Blood-borne viruses (BBVs) HIV (Human immunodeficiency virus, a retrovirus, family *Retroviridae*), hepatitis B virus (family *Hepadnaviridae*) and hepatitis C virus (genus *Hepacivirus*, family *Flaviviridae*) though often spread sexually, are grouped under the category of blood-borne viruses on the pretext of the establishment of a viremia in which the infectious virus circulates in the blood, with the primary means of transmission being an exposure to contaminated blood or other bodily fluids, such as occurring in a therapeutic blood transfusion, the usage of hypodermic injections and intravenous drug use (Strauss & Strauss, 2008, pp. 1-32).

Note: Hepatitis C, however, is not primarily sexually transmitted (see Chapter 4). Therefore, it would have been erroneous to place this disease under the broad heading of STIs/STDs. Accordingly, HIV, in spite of being considered as a BBV was clubbed under its causative agent - a virus, and hence ‘Viral STIs/STDs’, to ease categorization (Chapters 3 and 4). Moreover, since the BBVs are also essentially viruses, hence the term ‘other’ was introduced before BBVs to distinguish this cohort from the ‘Viral STIs/STDs’. This accounted for the second terminology ‘other BBVs’ in the title of the study and considered as separate from the first ‘STIs’.

Knowledge

Knowledge in a subjective or intersubjective sense is the total sum of beliefs to which an individual or a group may subscribe (Bar-Tal & Kruglanski, 1988, p. 3).

Attitude

attitudes... [are]... a state of readiness or predisposition to respond in a certain manner when confronted with certain stimuli...attitudes are reinforced by beliefs (the cognitive component), often attract strong feelings (the emotional component) which may lead to particular behavioural intents (the action tendency component) (Oppenheim, 1992, pp. 174-175).

Pre-service teachers

Pre-service teachers are students enrolled in a university's teacher education program who are working toward teacher certification. The majority of pre-service teachers are undergraduate students in their junior and senior years of college, although there are exceptions including post-baccalaureate or graduate students pursuing teacher certification and individuals pursuing alternative routes to certification and licensure (Braud, 2007, p. 16).

Abstract

The rate of sexually transmissible infections and other blood-borne viruses is high in South Australia. Young people are prone to contracting these diseases who rely on school programs for their health-related behaviours. Health-related behaviours, specifically knowledge and attitudes, can successfully disseminate from teachers to students. Hence, the present study explored the knowledge and attitudes of pre-service teachers in South Australia towards these diseases besides evoking perspectives towards disease-related issues, the role of an effective education thereof, and teacher education in addressing sexual health.

The samples (N = 320) comprised of pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher education courses at higher educational institutions in the State. Data collection from the samples took the form of a cross-sectional survey, both at the pilot and the main stages of study. The pilot study was essential to establishing the validity and reliability aspects of the knowledge and attitude scales of the developed questionnaire, which, however, was also measured at the main stage of analysis. A Rasch item analysis using the Quest Version 2.1 software established evidence of a construct validity and an acceptable reliability of both the scales at either stages of study.

Subsequent data analysis pertaining to the knowledge and attitudes largely depended on the Rasch estimates being non-parametric, and therefore, the application of non-parametric statistics using the SPSS Version 18.0 software. The open-ended perspectives with 272 valid responses, however, underwent a qualitative thematic analysis.

The quantitative analysis revealed a poor level of knowledge (mean score of 18.57 out of a possible 45) and a favourable attitude (mean score of 44.45 out of a possible 51) of South Australian pre-service teachers towards the diseases, with a low to

moderate positive relationship between the knowledge and attitude attributes ($r_s = .196$, $p < 0.01$). School, peers, and mass media campaigns constituted the major sources of information related to the diseases. There were no significant differences of either the knowledge or the attitude scores across the demographic variables gender, highest educational level, subject stream, and undertaking the related curriculum. However, attitude scores varied across age, with knowledge revealing no significant difference as earlier.

The qualitative analysis revealed that the majority of pre-service teachers perceived an information gap and an attitude and behaviour of individuals as primarily responsible for a high disease rate in the State and young people contracting these, respectively. The majority perceived that the related curriculum does not address STI-related issues and that teachers are primarily responsible for the lack of a comprehensive sex education in the State. The majority, however, was largely supportive towards the call for a compulsory sex education. Further, reflecting that they themselves lack adequate knowledge on these diseases, pre-service teachers suggested the introduction of sexual health as a core topic in teacher education.

The findings have implications for educators, policy makers, key stakeholders in the field of sexual health education, and the school and the community to raise awareness of the many areas that adolescents and young adults experience problems in, and particularly related to sexual health.

Keywords: knowledge, attitudes, pre-service teachers, sexually transmissible infections, blood-borne viruses

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to *Joy Talukdar* and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due references has been made in the text.

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Name: Joy Talukdar

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Publications arising from the Thesis

1. **Talukdar, J.** (2013). The epidemiology of STDs and AIDS in early Australia. *Internet Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 2(1).
2. **Talukdar, J., & Aspland, T.** (2013). Review of STI-related 'knowledge' and 'attitude' studies: Implications for teacher education in South Australia. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 4(1), 65-80.
doi:10.1080/18377122.2013.760428.
3. **Talukdar, J., Aspland, T., & Datta, P.** (2013). Sex education in South Australia: the past and the present. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*, 13(1), 107-116. doi: 10.1080/14681811.2012.681037.
4. **Talukdar, J.** (2012). The history of sexually transmitted diseases. *International Journal of Medical and Health Sciences*, 1(3), 83-88.
5. **Talukdar, J., & Aspland, T.** (2012). Is the 'Health and Physical Education' curriculum in South Australia enough? A critical review of the SACSA framework and the new SACE curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 1(1), 25-40. doi: 10.5430/jct.v1n1p25.

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Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts.

Henri Frédéric Amiel (1821-1881) Swiss writer.

Unfortunately, unlike words, the acts of gratitude cannot be painted on paper.

Nevertheless, if it is only words that determine the quality of a work thus, then it should also do its job for the players behind the work. Further, how can it be that for a work expressed in quantitative and qualitative terminologies, the words of thankfulness themselves do not reiterate the same?

Accordingly, the first words of thankfulness owes to my education at school and college. The *central tendency* during those years was to skip classes; nevertheless, those attended were sufficient to instil in me the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to pursue a work in the calibre of a thesis.

A good education of a child, in turn, owes a lot to good parents. While my biological parents endowed me with the education that sustains me to date, my acquired parents (parents-in-law) made me believe that ‘I can’; however, the quadruple in their constant support and encouragement helped establish a strong and positive *correlation* between my self-concept and self-esteem.

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Learning itself, however, is incumbent on the successful run of an establishment. It is not only the administrative staff of the establishment but also the colleagues, who, in terms of their guidance, support, motivation, and endurance render a *significant difference* to learning, which in turn is reflected in quality work produced.

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It is not always winning over the self that works - there needs to be a constant inspiration too! How often were the bills paid, the dinner laid, and intangible inspirations conveyed? The other self, the angel in my life, my wife Poulomee, rarely did sway in her emotions even when I did *deviate* from the *standards* of conjugal bliss by committing frequent *errors*. Believe me Poulomee, I did not want to be *mean* and this I prove by dedicating this work to you!!!