



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

# IJDR

*International Journal of Development Research*  
Vol. 09, Issue, 03, pp.26576-26578, March, 2019



REVIEW ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

## PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS ABOUT SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2018

Received in revised form

16<sup>th</sup> January, 2019

Accepted 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

Published online 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2019

#### Key Words:

Adolescents; Schoolchildren;  
Sexuality; Sexually Transmitted Infections

### ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to know the adolescents' perception about STIs. **Methods:** a qualitative descriptive-exploratory study with 23 adolescents of both sexes, aged 14 to 18 years, students of the 1st year of high school. Applied questionnaire exploring socioeconomic profile, knowledge of adolescents and sexual behavior. **Results:** there was a predominance of females in the 14 to 18 age group, mostly unmarried, without paid occupation and Catholic religion. As for knowledge, most adolescents do not use condoms and on the types of STIs, there was predominance of AIDS, followed by gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis, herpes and HPV. As sources of information highlighted the internet and TV. **Conclusion:** adolescents possess insipid knowledge, making it difficult to adopt safety measures for themselves and their partners, which justifies, on this occasion, inadequate positions regarding their sexual experiences, requiring, therefore, more effective and effective interventions of prevention services, promotion and protection of health.

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**Citation:** Iolanda Gonçalves de Alencar Figueiredo, Déborah Luz Martirios, Huderlândia Gomes de Sousa et al. 2019. "Perception of public school adolescents about sexually transmitted infections", *International Journal of Development Research*, 09, (03), 26576-26578.

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, the transition between childhood and adulthood, is characterized by important biopsychosocial transformations, whose personality is in the final phase of structuring. Sexuality is part of this series of changes, forming one of the foundations of the identity of the adolescent. The vulnerability and risk conditions of these adolescents are often associated with the use of illicit drugs, situations of violence and sexual activity that can result from an early pregnancy to a Sexually Transmissible Infection (STI) (1). In this context, the theme of Sexually Transmitted Infections is highlighted. Data from the National Health Survey at the School show that 28.7% of the 9th graders have ever had sexual intercourse in their lifetime, and the proportion is higher for boys (40.1%) than for girls (18.3%).

This raises the interest in developing research that seeks to identify adolescents' perceptions of the risks they are exposed through early sexual activity, which is often unprotected (2). Evidence suggests that treatment for these STIs is offered by SUS in the vast majority of cases. Where some of them, in addition to hospitalizations and procedures necessary for the treatment of their complications, also cause a great social impact that translates into direct or indirect costs to the country's economy, which could be avoided through active strategies of STI prevention (3). In this sense, this research had as a proposal to answer the following questions: What is the adolescents' knowledge about STIs during the experience of their sexualities?

The study aimed to know the perception of school adolescents about STIs and to contribute information that subsidizes better strategies of professional practice, preventive, aimed at this population.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is a descriptive study of a qualitative nature (4-5), consisting of 23 (twenty-three) adolescents of both sexes, in the age group of 14 to 18 years. We included schoolchildren from the 9th grade of elementary school to the 1st year of high school, in the above age group who agreed to participate and whose parents authorized their participation through the signing of the Free and Informed Consent Term. Data were collected between May and June 2016, guided by a semi-structured interview script type instrument. The interviews were delimited from the exhaustion presented in the statements, represented in this way, the researcher's attention in carrying out interviews in enough number to allow some recidivism of the information, guaranteeing a maximum of diversification and comprehensiveness for the reconstitution of the object in the material as a whole, thus verifying the formation of a whole (5). The data were interpreted from the content analysis (5), and the participants had their identities preserved by the adoption of alpha numeric codes. After transcription, the data were organized into blocks and segments of texts that gave rise to the categories of analysis: adolescent knowledge about STIs and sexual behavior manifested. The findings were interpreted and discussed in light of relevant literature. The study met all the formal requirements contained in research standards that involve human beings, through resolution 466/2012, being approved according to opinion nº 1,131,996 (6).

## RESULTS

**Socioeconomic Characterization:** The research showed a predominance of females 15 (fifteen) over 8 (eight), 15 years for girls (eight) and boys (three). Regarding marital status, the majority of adolescents were single 12 (twelve) although 3 (three) maintained stable union. The boys, on the whole, reported being single. When dealing with the occupation, 9 (nine) girls and 6 (six) boys reported only studying, while the others performed other activities besides studying as a babysitter, secretariat, day laborers, waiter in a nightclub with commercialization of alcoholic beverages and "coroinha" (one who assists the priest at the altar and mass celebrations).

### Adolescent Knowledge of Sexually Transmitted Infections

When questioned about what they knew about STIs, the majority (21) of the adolescents stated that it is a disease that is transmitted through sex without a condom, according to these excerpts:

*It is when the person does not take care, has no hygiene, 14 years B1.*

*It is that disease that the person does not take care and takes, for lack of information, 14 years B2.*

*Like you have sex without a condom ... Sit in private, 15 years old A3.*

As for signs of STIs, blemishes were reported by most adolescents. Some have reported being injured in the body and in the mouth, others have a vaginal itching in the body and in the mouth, lumps and discharge. Since 7 (seven) of them could not express any knowledge and others presented a rather unspecific knowledge, type:

*Ah I do not know. I think the person starts to vomit, to have headaches ... 15 years, A6.*

*Fever, body aches, headaches ... 15 years, A2.*

**When asked if, in the case of having an STI, they would say to the partner, unanimously stated that they would communicate**

*I, in the case, being married would be obliged to speak [...] Do not go from one to another, 15 years and married, A1.*

*It is important to say: not to transmit using prevention or using the pills you have today for AIDS and other diseases, you do not look good, but to a certain extent it decreases, 16 years, A11.*

*Would say. I think that's wrong. There are people who do it on purpose just for other people to pick up. Not to pass would try to understand the disease and do as much as possible not to pass, 14 years, B1.*

*I would ban sex life, 14, B3.*

**Knowing the Sexual Behavior of Adolescents:** The evaluation of the sexual behavior of the adolescents surveyed was initially approached through the individual protection of adolescents during intercourse. Of the 23 (twenty three) adolescents, 9 (nine) of them never practiced sexual intercourse, 14 (fourteen), only 4 (four) reported having used condoms in all sexual relations. Three of the four adolescents who claimed to have used condoms in all sexual relationships also claimed to have a fixed partner, while only 1 (one) reported having more than one partner at a time. It is noteworthy that of the ten adolescents who affirmed unprotected sex act, eight of them had a fixed partner. It is interesting to note that when asked about the reason for the unprotected act, three of them justified the fact that they were in a stable union.

*Because he was a boy who did not have to use it, 17, A13.*

*For not liking too much and it was only with one person, 17, A14.*

At the time I had no condom, I had drunk that day, if not I think I was going to look, 16, B6. Concerning the use of condoms in all types of sexual relations (vaginal, oral and anal) 2 (two) of the adolescents mentioned above (A13 and A14) stated that their use was necessary in all situations, at the time when two (B5 and B7) made the following statements:

*Only vaginal and anal, because oral saliva does not catch Aids, 15 years, B5. Oral does not have to because of discomfort. I do not think I get sick too, 18, B7.*

## DISCUSSION

In this research, there was a predominance of females, in the 15 - year - old age group. A similar result was found in a survey of 91 adolescents from a public school in the city of São Paulo - SP, whose purpose was to identify their knowledge about the main STIs And also in a research that aimed to identify adolescents' knowledge about pregnancy, STIs and drugs in the city of Picos-PI, predominantly female and 15 years old (7). Regarding marital status, the majority of adolescents were single, some of whom lived in a stable union. The boys, in their totality, reported being single. Similar to these results, another investigation (8) showed that all male adolescents reported being single. Most adolescents said they needed to work and study at the same time. In a survey carried out in public schools in São Paulo, about the adolescents'

knowledge about the main ISTs, it was identified that 42% of the adolescents worked and only two of them had a formal education as a young apprentice (9). These are worrying data that have drawn attention, because although there are guarantees in the law (10) and this determines that the young apprentice is the adolescent or young person between 14 and 24 years old who is enrolled and attending school if he did not finish teaching medium, and enrolled in a learning program (11) is not what actually occurs in reality here.

Most of these adolescents suffer from various social vulnerabilities and are often obliged to start work early to provide for themselves and / or the people with whom they live (6). Adolescents showed little knowledge about sexually transmitted infections, this result differs from that found in a survey carried out in Jaboatão dos Guararapes - PE with 32 adolescents, where they observed that adolescents had a satisfactory index of knowledge about STIs. This shows the inability to recognize related changes, thus delaying the search for the health service, through appropriate and specific treatment (12). In Rio Grande do Sul, a study with schoolchildren showed different data related to this investigation, where 89.2% of the girls and 90.3% of the boys knew how to properly define the concept of sexually transmitted diseases; for 98.5% of the girls and 98.9% of the boys the use of condoms is the most effective method to prevent these diseases (13). When questioned, if in the case of having an STI, they would say to the partner, all affirmed yes. This points to a positive attitude of the respondents who are inclined, in theory, to a concern about caring for each other and their well-being. It is true that in the discourse there is also the option of "banishing sexual life", which should be encouraged given the existence of health programs and actions that support, treat and control these situations of illness, which in kids, it is not convenient this radical decision regarding sex and sexuality. When asked how they would not transmit and did not get an IST, the majority of respondents claimed to be through the condom, although not used by the majority of adolescents with active sex life as reported in this study. Findings like this were also identified in another study in the city of São Paulo, where 91% of adolescents interviewed said they understood the importance of condom use. (9). Some referred to sexual abstinence as a strategy to lessen the chance of contracting AIDS. A similar result was found in a study with 48 adolescents in the State of Minas Gerais, in which 48% of the participants mentioned sexual abstinence as a way to reduce the chance of contracting AIDS (14). Most of the adolescents participating in this study reported knowing at least AIDS, a result that resembles another research, where at first all adolescents reported having knowledge about AIDS and in the second referred to as the sole IST (10). It is interesting to note that in the imaginary of these adolescents, AIDS appears as the fearsome or only IST, and therefore other infections are not referred to as sexually transmissible, and this needs to be deconstructed, since STIs can, in general, trigger a series of short-term problems in the individual's life. The Internet and TV were mentioned here as the main search engines about STIs. In divergence, research with academics in the search for information on the exercise of sexuality states

that most received guidance through friends and aunt, aligned to this was conducted in Rondônia study in which 15% were guided by relatives, data become surprising, because it demonstrates a participatory nucleus among adolescents (7,15). It is emphasized that the internet.

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