

ABSTRACT

Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices of Journalists in Jamaica Regarding HIV/AIDS

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Local mass media have been accused of insensitivity to HIV/AIDS issues. There have been attempts at content analysis, however, no previous research has been undertaken to examine journalists' level of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding HIV/AIDS.

The aim of this study was to determine whether knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices of journalists and media practitioners in Jamaica have any influence on their perception of their role in supporting national HIV prevention and control efforts.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire of 43 items revised after exposure to a pre-test. It was exposed to a random sample of 60 and 40 were self-administered and returned. Associations were determined using the chi-squared analysis. (Epi Info 6)

Respondents between 18 and 47 years and having at least attained secondary education showed a high level of awareness about factors, which influence transmission of HIV. A small number expressed doubt about certain factors and demonstrated the tendency to support misconceptions.

There was evidence of a low level of awareness that women are more vulnerable to HIV than men. A high percentage was not aware about possible HIV transmission to an infant through the breast milk of an infected mother. Although there was 100% awareness that HIV is transmitted during sexual contact, when asked about possible transmission through various sexual behaviours, the knowledge level fluctuated and tended downwards.

As high as 37.5% showed a tendency to use the word "victim" in reference to a persons with AIDS. One third said they would be very comfortable touching a person with HIV or AIDS and 42.5% had encountered someone with HIV while 27.5% met someone with AIDS.

A total of 77.5% believed that every company should have an HIV/AIDS workplace policy. Respondents agreed that the media should have a role in HIV/AIDS education efforts, however 50% indicated involvement in preparing and publicising HIV/AIDS information within a 6-12 month period.

Mass media need to be targeted as a special group having a vital role in national HIV prevention efforts.