

## THE ATTITUDES OF TAMIL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS REGARDING SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

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**Abstract:** *Similar to most religions, Hindu thoughts and beliefs will also impact attitudes on sexuality and connected issues among those adhering to the faith. At present, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are a global health concern, spreading rapidly all over the world. The most risky group to have STIs is the youth, aged 15 – 24 years (WHO, 2015). However, youth are not homogeneous, and differ by many other factors; ethnicity plays a key role in framing attitudes related to youth sexual behavior and its consequences such as STIs. Since Hindu prohibits certain behavior which can be connected to the spread of STIs, Tamil youth are considered a group with reduced risks of getting STIs. In order to verify this, the main scope of this study is to identify the attitudes regarding STIs among Tamil university youth. Seventy Tamil respondents were selected from five different faculties by using purposive sampling method. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire in 2016. Respondents' mean age was 23.5 years. Respondents' STIs related knowledge was reasonably low. More than 50 per cent had pessimistic attitudes regarding use of condoms, as a protective mechanism. As an optimistic sign, nearly 60 per cent of the respondents disapproved extramarital sex. More than 40 per cent of respondents stated that, religion is a barrier to improve knowledge on STIs. However, students showed a keen interest to learn about STIs. This research proposes organizing ethnic based panel discussions, annual compulsory lectures, and creating reproductive health counseling centers to enhance the knowledge and attitudes regarding STIs among Tamil university youths.*

**Keywords:** Sexually Transmitted Infections, University Students, Youth, Ethnicity

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### Introduction

Spread of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) is a major concern with regard to global health. As mentioned by the World Health Organization –WHO (2013), more than one million people are getting reported as STI patients daily and 500 million people suffer from STIs annually. The unlimited physical and mental freedom that occurs with the rapid development of technology and globalization has massively contributed to the significant spread of STIs throughout the world.

It is important to note that more than 95 per cent of HIV and STIs patients are reported in the Asian countries and the majority of newly identified patients are reported in the South Asian countries (Rathnayaka, 2002). Sri Lanka being a South Asian country, this shows that the country is in a highly vulnerable situation with regard to the spread of STIs. In Sri Lanka, 60,000 to 200,000 STIs patients get treatment from the STD clinics annually (World Bank, 2005).

It is also important to note that the number of STIs patients are gradually increasing since 2009 in the county (National STD/AIDS Control Programme -NSACP, 2014). As reported by the NSACP (2014), during the period 1987- 2014, the majority of HIV

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