

Abstract

HIV and AIDS is a global public health problem with 36.7 million people living with the virus. HIV and AIDS education is taught in Kenyan universities as an undergraduate course with the aim of reducing levels of new transmission but few studies have been conducted to determine its impact. Using questionnaires, the study was carried out to determine the differences between students who had been taken through HIV and AIDS course (experimental) and those who had not undertaken the course (control) among first year students of South Eastern Kenya University, Kitui. The Pearson Chi-Square and Fisher's Exact tests were used to analyze data. 682 students took part in the study. 291 were experimental and 391 were control while 380 were males and 302 were females. A significantly higher proportion of experimental students correctly responded to the following knowledge and awareness indicator issues: HIV spread through semen, vaginal fluid and blood ($P=0.001$), there is a female condom that helps to decrease the chances of a woman getting HIV ($P=0.03$), a person will not contract HIV if he/she is taking antibiotics ($P=0.01$), taking a test for HIV one week after having sex will inform whether one has HIV or not ($P=0.000$) and a person can contract HIV by having oral sex ($P=0.001$). The following attitude, perception and practices indicators were significantly different between the two groups of students: I feel shy talking about condoms with my boy or girlfriend ($P=0.02$), it is a good idea for students to delay having sex until they are older or until marriage ($P=0.01$). Some of the differences were due to belonging to a particular gender. 7.9% and 11.8% of experimental and control students respectively had not taken an HIV test in the last one year. 86.2% and 81.8% of control and experimental student respectively appreciated teaching of HIV and AIDS in Kenyan Universities. Differences observed between control and experimental were influenced by beliefs in some myths and lack of or imbalanced HIV and AIDS education regarding transmission, management and prevention. The differences seemed to be contributed by a particular gender of the students. In order to realize the positive impact of these lessons, delivery of HIV and AIDS education content needs to be addressed. Additionally, the subject should be taught during the first semester of their first year of study. Majority of the students appreciated the importance of HIV and AIDS education in Kenyan Universities.