

## A Cross-Sectional Study of Knowledge and Attitudes among College Students in a South Indian City about Intimate Partner Violence

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**Abstract :** Introduction: Young people's attitude towards Intimate partner violence (IPV) is likely to influence their indulgence in or abstinence from IPV in future. We aimed to assess the knowledge and attitudes of college students in a south Indian city regarding IPV, its associated factors and redressal mechanisms. Methods: A convenient sample of 247 students, pursuing medicine and engineering, participated in this analytical cross sectional study. They responded to a self-administered questionnaire developed and pretested for this study. The questionnaire comprises statements from a third person's perspective and vignettes to reduce social desirability bias. Clearance was obtained from the Institute Ethical Committee of Velammal Medical College Hospital and Research Institute, Madurai, India. Data were entered in Epidata Entry v3.1, Odense, Denmark and analysed using SPSS v20.0. Results: Among 247 students, 116 (47%) were males and 59 (24.9%) hailed from rural areas. About 18% (43) of students believed that IPV was a problem only among females. Almost half of the students had witnessed IPV; at home between their parents (9.7%), other family members (13.4%), in their neighbourhood (13%) or public places (15%). Only 118 (47.8%) were aware that a law was in place in India to address IPV. The perceived risk factors for IPV were alcoholic spouse (78.9%), low income families (53.8%), personality traits (52.2%) and dowry system (51%). A sizeable number of students (38.4%) believed that some amount of physical violence was allowable in a marital relationship while 57.6% even considered IPV as an expression of love. Males as compared to females were more in agreement with negative gender stereotypes such as husband can- 'threaten wife to ensure welfare of family' (55% vs. 34%,  $p < 0.001$ ), 'spy on wife to check fidelity' (41% vs. 27%,  $p < 0.001$ ), 'financially deprive housewife to punish' (13% vs. 3.8%,  $p=0.001$ ) and agreed with the statement that it is 'duty of wife to comply with demands for sex from the husband' (9.5% vs 4.6%,  $p=0.3$ ). About 32% males and 25.6% females foresaw themselves as perpetrators of IPV in future. Conclusion: Knowledge about IPV and the associated risk factors among the study population was satisfactory. However, there was widespread acceptance of negative societal gender stereotypes, more so among males and some degrees of IPV were acceptable between married couples. The study advocates the need to halt the propagation of negative gender stereotypes in the impressionable young minds and the necessity to spread the awareness that no degree of IPV is acceptable. This knowledge is also required to plan the content and choose the appropriate media to effectively communicate the awareness about IPV among young persons.

**Keywords :** attitude, India, intimate partner violence, knowledge, students

**Conference Title :** ICPHSJ 2017 : International Conference on Public Health and Social Justice

**Conference Location :** Paris, France

**Conference Dates :** June 25-26, 2017