

AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS HIV/AIDS AMONG RESIDENTS OF KANDY,
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ABSTRACT Currently, interventions for HIV/AIDS control in Sri Lanka are only carried out among the most-at-risk populations. This study was conducted to identify the level of awareness and stigma-related attitudes among the general population of Sri Lanka. A cross-sectional study was carried out among 869 residents of 18-64 years of age in Kandy, Sri Lanka. A self-administered questionnaire was utilised to obtain information about stigma, discrimination and HIV/AIDS-related knowledge. Chi-square test and multivariate analysis were applied to find possible associations between HIV-related variables and socio-demographic indicators. Response rate was 82.0%. Overall, 93.5% of the participants have heard of HIV/AIDS but the knowledge on HIV/AIDS was low with an average score of 51.7%, no statistically significant difference between genders ($p = 0.352$). Only 58.1% were aware that a condom was an effective tool for its prevention. There were many misconceptions related to epidemiology of HIV/AIDS. The participants showed more positive attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) for all questionnaire items except for those listed under shame and blame. Positive attitudes towards PLHIV were observed to be greater among those with a better HIV/AIDS-related knowledge score. There was no significant association between the attitudes towards PLHIV and socio-demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and religion. There is a greater need of making attempts towards educating the public regarding HIV/AIDS to eliminate misconceptions prevalent in the society. Stigma-related attitudes are mainly due to shame and blame associated with the disease. As the attitudes towards PLHIV were more positive among those with a better HIV/AIDS-related knowledge score, targeted HIV/AIDS-related health education interventions maybe recommended in this regard.