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Community knowledge and the role of health extension workers on integrated diseases among households in East Hararghe Zone, Ethiopia

Ayichew Seyoum, Kedir Urgessa, Tesfaye Gobena

Correspondence: Ayichew Seyoum
College of Health and Medical Sciences,
Haramaya University, PO Box 235, Harar,
Ethiopia
Tel +251 25 911 003 879
Fax +251 25 256 668 081
Email ayichewseyoum@gmail.com

Background: Ethiopia constitutes approximately 1% of the world's population but it contributes to 7% of the world's HIV/AIDS cases. Malaria is the most important disease of humans in terms of mortality, morbidity, and long-term effects upon quality of life, especially in Ethiopia. Despite the ongoing efforts and progress in fighting HIV/AIDS and malaria, these diseases remain the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in the country. In this study, we assessed community knowledge and the role of health extension workers on integrated diseases among households in East Hararghe Zone, Ethiopia.

Methods: A community-based multistage stratified cross-sectional study was conducted from February to March 2014 among six woredas of the East Hararghe Zone, Ethiopia. The data were collected from 2,319 households using structured questionnaires. A total of 12 well trained data collectors conducted a face-to-face interview with the head female of each household. The data entered on Epi-Data version 3 were then exported for analysis on STATA version 11.

Results: Multivariable logistic regression showed that among the 1,967 (92.7%) study participants who scored above the mean value in regard to the overall knowledge of HIV/AIDS, study participants who could read/write (adjusted odd ratios [AOR] =2.54, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.15–5.61, P=0.021) and worked as a daily laborer (AOR =0.40, 95% CI: 0.17–0.91, P=0.029) were significantly associated with comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Meanwhile, out of the 2,172 eligible study participants for the malaria interview, 934 (43%) scored above the mean in regard to the overall knowledge about malaria. Rural residents (AOR =0.27, 95% CI: 0.17–0.44, P<0.005), >45 years of age (AOR =1.44, 95% CI: 1.04–1.99, P=0.030), and single marital status (AOR =3.81, 95% CI: 1.97–7.37, P<0.005) were significantly associated with comprehensive knowledge about malaria.

Conclusion: Based on the findings of this study, health extension workers' number of monthly regular visits of each household was high; with the overall knowledge of study participants' regarding malaria was unsatisfactory, unlike the overall knowledge of study participants regarding HIV/AIDS, which is very high.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, malaria, health extension workers, knowledge