



EPIDEMIOLOGY

KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF COMMUNITY TOWARDS LEPROSY.

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Background: Leprosy is caused by bacteria named mycobacterium leprae. In perception of community, leprosy is disabling, incurable, hereditary disease, and associated with dirtiness, oozy and bad smelling wounds. Negative perceptions result in reduced quality of life of leprosy patients and restrict their access to health care services. In Nepal, there is high burden of leprosy, especially in eastern Terai communities.

Objective: To assess knowledge and attitude of the community towards leprosy.

Materials and Methods: Community based cross sectional study was conducted in Mithila, Nepal. Two hundred and forty five houses were selected using systematic random sampling. Structured closed ended questionnaire was prepared after review of relevant literatures. Data was entered in SPSS version 20. Chi-square test was performed and p-value <0.01 was considered statistically significant.

Results: Thirty one percent of the respondents had good knowledge on leprosy. Sixty five percent of the respondents had unfavorable attitude towards leprosy and leprosy patients. Forty four percent had fear of feeling ashamed of having leprosy. Eighty two percent of the respondents said that they will support treatment if family member is found to have leprosy. There is significant positive correlation between level of knowledge of leprosy and level of attitude towards leprosy in community ($r=0.505$) at 0.01 level of significance. Age, religion and educational status had highly significant statistical association with knowledge while age, ethnicity and educational status are significantly related with attitudes of the community towards leprosy.

Conclusions: There was positive correlation between knowledge and attitude towards leprosy. With the increase in the level of knowledge of leprosy, there will be an increase in the level of positive attitude towards leprosy. Emphasis on health education should be given to reduce stigmatizing behaviors and to improve the community knowledge about leprosy and attitude towards leprosy patients, taking local beliefs and perceptions into account.

