



Public awareness about Hepatitis B and C

Produced by: Gallup Pakistan Jointly with Gilani Research Foundation

July-August Edition
(A national survey on Public awareness about Hepatitis B and C)

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From the Editor

Dear Reader,

Gallup Pakistan would like to present findings of a nation wide study on awareness about risk factors, treatment and prevention of Hepatitis B and C. We are thankful to Dr M.Umar for giving his valuable comments on this important health problem. We look forward to your comments and suggestions.

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Highlights

Awareness of Hepatitis B/C: Majority (88%) have at least heard of the name.

Perception on Transmission Modes: Most are aware of transmission by unscreened blood and used syringes. Awareness about spread through contaminated instruments is comparatively less.

Perception on treatment: Majority (86%) say that there is some treatment for Hepatitis B/C and majority mention Allopathic Medicine as remedy. But Alternative Modalities are also reported.

Perception on Prevention: 77% think there is a vaccine against Hepatitis B and 69% say there is a vaccine against Hepatitis C.

Is it a National Health Problem: 95% consider Hepatitis B/C to be a very important or important health problem for Pakistan.

Section 1: Ever heard of Hepatitis B/C?

Hepatitis B/C is a growing problem in Pakistan. The national survey on prevalence of Hepatitis B/C conducted by Pakistan Medical Research council (PMRC) gives a prevalence of 7.4% for both of these infections.

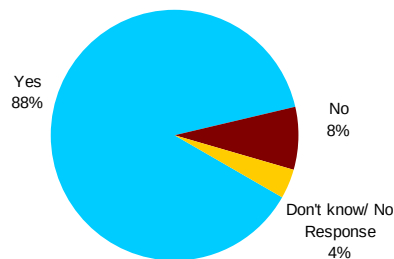
We asked a nationally representative sample of adult men and women spread across the four provinces if they had ever heard of Hepatitis B/C? 88% claim to have heard of it and the rest are not aware of it.

Further questions on transmission of infection, treatment and prevention were only asked of these 88% who were familiar with this term.

Please note that we have taken Hepatitis B/C as a single entity here for ease of understanding as people often consider them to be similar and they have common transmission routes.

Please note that this is a simple question and cannot indicate the knowledge of people about Hepatitis B/C. More detailed study on knowledge of symptoms of Hepatitis B/C is needed.

Have you ever heard of Hepatitis B/C?



Source: Gallup and Gilani National Survey (June, 2011)

Section 2: Perception on Transmission of Hepatitis B/C

Hepatitis B/C is a blood borne infection. It can be transmitted by blood contact either in the form of transfusion of infected blood or by contact with contaminated instruments e.g. surgical, dental or barbers' instruments. Similarly IV Drug users are at an increased risk of infection.

People say that prevention is better than cure. So it is important to create awareness about different modes of transmission of this infection so that people can adopt careful behaviors and thus avoid this infection. The National Program for Hepatitis Control has been conducting media campaigns for this purpose.

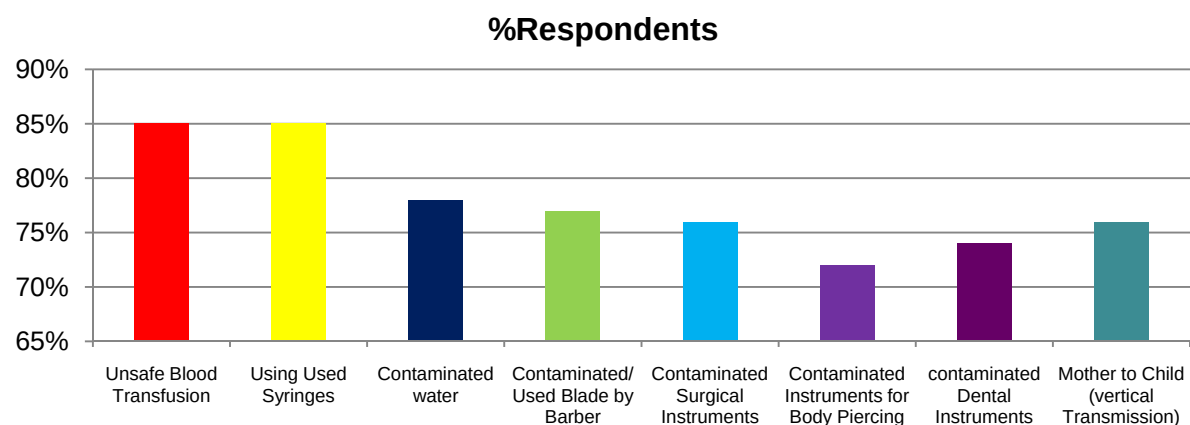
When we ask our respondents about different modes of transmission of Hepatitis B/C it is encouraging to note that majority think that it can be transmitted by transfusion of unscreened blood and using contaminated/used syringes.

But awareness about other modes e.g. contaminated surgical and dental instruments is comparatively less. Similarly fewer people are aware of the fact that such routine practices like use of contaminated instruments by barbers or contaminated instruments for body piercing can also spread this infection.

78% say that this infection can also spread by contaminated water though this is a common route for other types of Hepatitis i.e. Hepatitis A and E.

In your opinion how can Hepatitis B/C transmit from one person to another? I will name some modes; for each, please tell whether you consider it to be a likely mode for Hepatitis B/C transmission or not?

Only those who say "YES" to each of the following modes of transmission are shown.



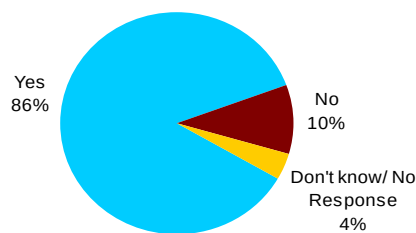
Source: Gallup and Gilani National Survey (June, 2011)

Section 3: Perception on Treatment of Hepatitis B/C: IS IT TREATABLE?

There is a lot of research in modern Medicine going on treatment of Hepatitis B/C in order to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with its complications especially liver cirrhosis, portal hypertension etc. But the treatment is expensive for poor population of our country. There has been some efforts to subsidize the treatment for poor patients under Hepatitis Control Program.

But people will seek treatment only if they are aware that one exists for the disease. It is encouraging to note that 86% say that there is some treatment for Hepatitis B/C but the rest are not aware of it.

Do you think that is there a treatment for Hepatitis B/C or not?



Source: Gallup and Gilani National Survey (June, 2011)

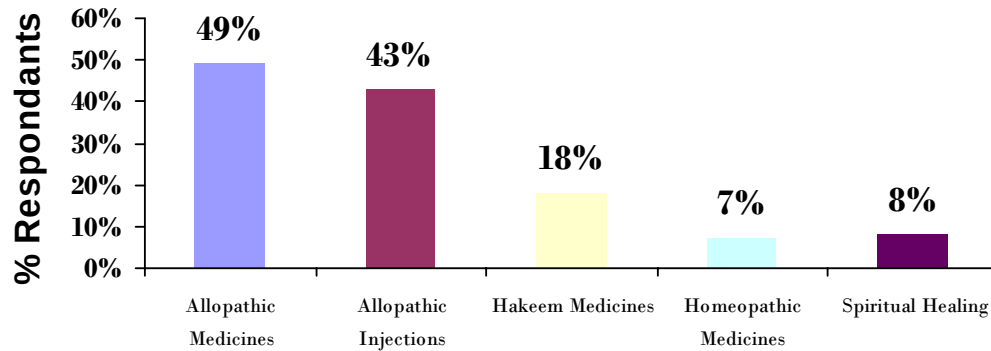
PERCEPTION ON TREATMENT OF HEPATITIS B/C

In Pakistan, apart from Allopathic Medicine, alternative medicine like Homeopathy, Hikmat and Spiritual Healing are also practiced. The trend of use of these alternative modalities has been reported for Hepatitis B/C as well primarily because of high cost of Allopathic Medicines.

When we asked those respondents who think there is some treatment for Hepatitis B/C to name the types of treatments they are aware of; majority mentions allopathic treatment (Medicines and Injections reported by 49% and 43% respectively. But other modalities especially Hakim Medicines are also reported.



*In your opinion, what kind of treatment is possible for Hepatitis B/C?**



Source: Gallup and Gilani National Survey (June, 2011)

*Multiple Response question. Responses might not add to 100%

Please note that it is only the perception on availability of different treatment modalities and not the preference for any treatment modality.

SECTION 4: PERCEPTION ON PREVENTION OF HEPATITIS B/C: IS THERE A VACCINE?

One of the ways of protecting against many infectious diseases is to create protective immunity by immunization. Protective vaccines are available against Hepatitis B which has been included in Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) as a routine in childhood immunization.

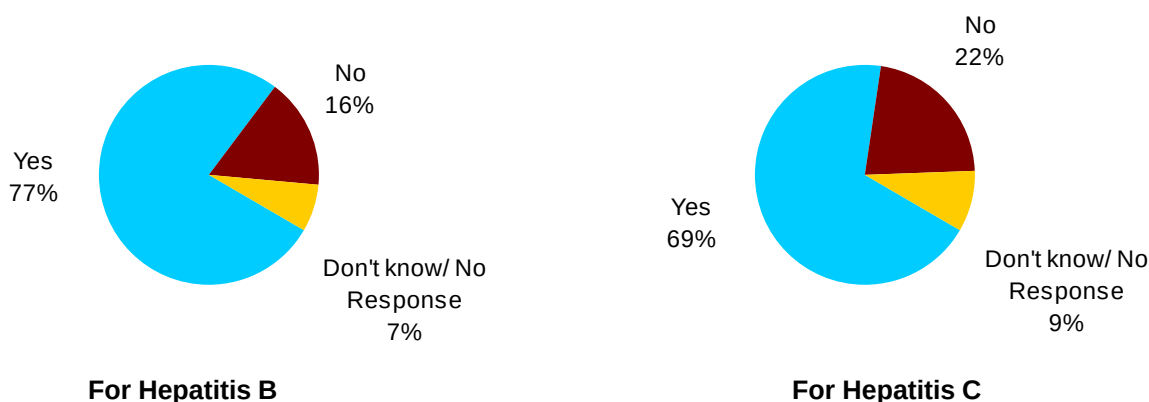
Currently, no vaccine is available against Hepatitis C.

We asked the public perceptions on whether they think there is a vaccine for each of these diseases.

Though majority (77%) think that there is a protective vaccine against Hepatitis B but a large number (69%) think that there is a vaccine against Hepatitis C as well.

It is important to dispel such misconception and advocate that it is important to adopt precautionary measures like using disposable syringes/ razors, avoiding un-necessary injections, using screened blood, promoting sterilization of surgical and dental instruments etc in order to prevent both Hepatitis B and C. Additionally, immunization against Hepatitis B should also be promoted.

Do you think that there is a vaccine for protection against Hepatitis B and C respectively?

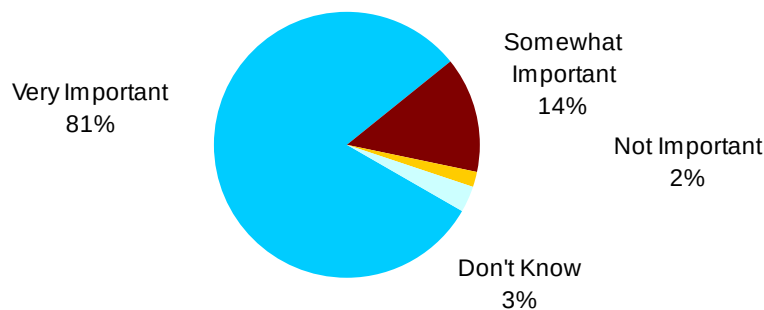


Source: Gallup and Gilani National Survey (June, 2011)

SECTION 5: DO YOU THINK HEPATITIS B/C IS A HEALTH PROBLEM FOR PAKISTAN?

Being a Doctor you might be seeing patients presenting with complications of Hepatitis B/C everyday in Hospitals and clinics. The Government is also running Hepatitis Control Program. But we wonder if a common Pakistani also perceives it to be a health problem for the country?

When asked, “In your opinion is Hepatitis B/C a very important, somewhat important or not an important health problem for Pakistan?”; 95% consider it to be a very important or important problem.



Source: Gallup and Gilani National Survey (June, 2011)



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METHODOLOGY NOTES

All findings in this Cyberletter are from Survey released by Gilani Research Foundation and carried out by Gallup Pakistan, the Pakistani affiliate of Gallup International. This survey was carried out among a sample of 2697 adult men and women in rural and urban areas of all four provinces of the country, during June, 2011. Multi stage random area probability sampling was adopted. In-house face to face Interviews were conducted using a Structured Questionnaire.

The findings are weighted according to rural and urban population share of the four provinces according to Population Census, 1998. All figures are National average unless otherwise specified. Error margin is estimated to be approximately $\pm 2-3$ per cent at 95% confidence level.

Comments by Professor Muhammad Umar
Chair & Professor of Medicine
Rawalpindi Medical College, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.



This is a wonderful survey for statistical analysis as well as a guideline for the policy makers particularly for the health department to evolve preventive strategies. Interestingly the awareness level in general public particularly the rural areas is still low. Also many from the general public believe that hepatitis B & C is transmitted via water which is untrue. I think based on this authenticated survey the government institutions, NGOs, social organizations, Pakistan society of Hepatology and Gastroenterology as well as other health experts should work on a unified forum to address this public health issue in Pakistan. As the recent PMRC survey in community revealed prevalence of Hepatitis C about 4.9% and Hepatitis B as 2.1% which makes about 1 million people vulnerable to chronic complication of Hepatitis B & C if not treated timely. Hepatocellular Carcinoma, one of the complications of chronic Hepatitis has become the 5th most common malignancy in Pakistan. End stage liver disease is the commonest cause of death for such patients. Therefore there is also a need for an effective liver transplant centre in the country.

Would you Like to Initiate a Similar Study on a Topic of Your Interest? If you would like to gauge Public perceptions on an issue of your interest, **please write to us.**



For more details on Methodology, please consult the Editorial Team.

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