

SURVEY REPORT

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO HIV PREVENTION

Intervention:

HIV/AIDS Prevention Interventions through Street Puppet Theatre

Sponsoring Organization:

Salaam Baalak Trust and,
Ishara Puppet Theatre

Chief Researcher:

Dushyant
Salaam Baalak Trust

Report written by:

Javed M. Iqbal

Introduction

"...We should no longer be guilty of the health of our people".

Source: M.K Gandhi 1940 quoted in Amrith 2007

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome(AIDS), is the leading cause of deaths among the adults worldwide (Narain 2006). According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) report tabled at the International AIDS conference 2006, 2.8 million people lost their lives to AIDS by the end of year 2005. Further it is estimated that as many as 38.6 million are infected globally by the virus (UNAIDS 2006). Hunter (2005) predicts that even if a cure against HIV and AIDS is found some day, the toll of death and suffering by 2010 will far exceed any other recorded human catastrophe, previous epidemic, natural disaster, war, or incident of genocidal violence (Hunter 2005:26).

Despite determined efforts to hold the epidemic in check, it shows no signs of declining. The disease has spread widely, affecting all continents and all countries of the world. In the process, it has stretched the health care systems, wrecks the economies and destroys the very fabric of what constitutes a nation: individual, families and communities, political institutions, military and police forces. Thus because of these concerns, HIV/AIDS is now considered not only a health problem, but also a developmental and security threat (Narain 2006, Garrett 2002, Singer 2002, Jacob 2005).

India is experiencing rapid and extensive spread of HIV. This is particularly worrisome since India is home to a population of over 1 billion. As a single nation it has more people than the continents of Africa, Australia and Latin America combined. The situation is graver in states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. A report by World Bank released at the 16th International AIDS Conference states that India is home to 60% of South Asia's HIV patients. The NACO and UNAIDS paints a contrasting pictures of HIV/AIDS estimates in India.

According to the estimated figure of the UNAIDS (United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) and WHO (World Health Organization), the number of people living with HIV/AIDS by the year 2006 is projected at 46 million. An estimated 4.1 million became newly infected with HIV and an estimated 2.8 million lost their lives to AIDS. Out of this 46 million, it has estimated that India alone has 5.7 million as compared to 5.3 million in 2003 (UNAIDS 2006). The UNAIDS statistics reveals that India is the most infected country surpassing South Africa.

However, as per Indian government (NACO 2006) statistics, India homes 5.5 million next to South Africa with 5.7 million people living with HIV/AIDS. The UNAIDS report estimates that 5.6 million adults aged 15 and over are living with HIV and among them the number of women (aged 15 and above) living with the virus is estimated as 1.6 million roughly 1.0 million ahead of the number recorded in 2003. The report further says that by the end of 2005 number of deaths due to AIDS lies within the range of 270000-680000 (Ibid).

Lack of education, lack of quality awareness campaign, difficulty in obtaining medications, and widespread misinformation about this deadly virus are all contributing factors to this worsening situation.

With these facts in mind, Salaam Baalak Trust in association with Ishara Puppet Theatre created the first of its kind AIDS Awareness Campaign through puppetry in the national capital region, Delhi.

Background

Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT) is a Non-profit Non Government Organization established in the year 1988 after the success of the film- Salaam Bombay, by Mira Nair. SBT provides support services for street and working children in central Delhi. It seeks to provide children a childhood and create an environment which allows them to explore and discover their talent and skill and to realize their rights. Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust, a leading puppet theatre group in Delhi has taken initiative in HIV/AIDS & Drugs

awareness programme. This venture has been supported by UNESCO-Paris and European Union.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to obtain data regarding awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS and the general population mandate regarding puppetry as an effective medium for mass communication. Further the project is also an initiative to empower street children in which children can make a career in puppetry and allied performing arts.

Key Players

The team has been formed with former street children who themselves are vulnerable for HIV infection.

Methodology

Based on HIV prevention information and Stigma & Discrimination, two plays are created to reach out to wide range & age of audiences across the Delhi state and other parts of India.. After developing, the plays were performed for different segments of audiences between the ages of 14-18 years; 18-25 years and, 25 and above years for their reactions, including high risk & bridge populations (MSM, CSWs, Street Children, Clients of CSW's), NGO professionals, students, educationists, house wives, children, and artists and people in general. The interventions have sought numerous comments on various issues. Questionnaires were distributed addressing the various questions like; Is HIV/AIDS a threat to public health and development of country, whether they are aware of all the modes of HIV transmission and, regarding stigma and discrimination around HIV/AIDS. We were interested more in the importance of puppetry as a medium in mass education. In-depth interviews via questionnaires were preferred for eliciting information because people feel too private to talk about in open. Data were collected in several phases.

The Plays

1. **"Chunouti"- The challenge:** The first production has been developed on HIV/AIDS prevention. The theme is based on the modes of HIV transmission where all 4 major modes have been depicted with strong prevention messages including condom use, use of disposable syringes, safe blood transfusion and doctor's care and institutional delivery for pregnant mother who is HIV positive. The play ends with the message; "AIDS is not only Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome but stand as A-Awareness Is Definitely Safe".
2. **Nazrein Kholo:** The latest Puppet show "Nazrein Kholo" is based on stigma and discrimination faced by people due to their HIV status. It is linked with previous play on HIV prevention. Nazrein Kholo glimpses the discrimination faced by HIV positive people in their own family, community, friends and more importantly at the health care system.

Reported Outcomes

Data from the study suggests that 85% of focus group between the ages 14 and 18 years perceive HIV/AIDS as threat to public health as well as to the development of the country and some 90 % of upper age groups i.e. 18 and above years reflects the same concern. Further the study reveals that the awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS transmission is adequate to high in the upper age groups contrary to very less among the young populations mostly the school goers. Merely 10% of the age group between 14 and 18 years are aware of all the major three modes of HIV/AIDS transmission as compared to 75% among the upper age groups. As per the survey statistics equal numbers of population in the upper age group are seemed to aware of the social stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and the percentage is meagerly less among the younger population.

However an overwhelming ninety-five percent of the respondents from all the age groups admitted puppetry as an effective medium for mass education and some equal number also favoured puppetry to take up other public issues.

Conclusion

There is remarkable lack of awareness and knowledge among young Indians mostly school goers regarding the transmission of this virus as compared to the other age groups. This disparity can be attributed to the particular traditional social set up and the absence of sex education in schools. Thus earlier introduction of this education in the schools and research are clearly needed in India. Further the study necessitates the introduction and initiation of innovative means in HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns for an effective mass education as one initiated by the surveying organisation in the form of puppetry. Most of them are of the view that the campaign does not only provide knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS to the mass, but as a true public health campaign it addresses attitudes and beliefs.

References

Farmer, Paul (2001), *Infections and Inequalities*, California: University of California Press.

Garrett, Laurie (July/August 2005), "The Lessons of HIV/AIDS", *Foreign Affairs*, 84 (4): 51-64.

Prins, G. and Bennett, T. (March 2006), "HIV/AIDS and Security: fact, fiction and evidence", *International Affairs*, 82 (2): 359-368

Hunter, Susan (2005), *AIDS in Asia: A Continent in Peril*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Narain, P. (2006), *AIDS in Asia: The Challenge Ahead*, New Delhi: Sage Publications India Ltd.

National AIDS Control Organization (2005), Statistics of HIV/AIDS in India (2005), downloaded from www.naco.org

National AIDS Control Organization (2004), Annual Report (2002-2003:2003-2004), downloaded from www.naco.org

Prins, G. and Barnett, T. (March 2006), "HIV/AIDS and Security: Fact, Fiction and evidence", *International Affairs*, 82 (2): 359-367.

Singer, P. (Spring 2002), "AIDS and International Security", *Survival*, 44(1): 145-157.

Suneetha, Barnett (2004), "AIDS in India: Disaster in the Making", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(19): 8-14.

UNAIDS (2006), *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, downloaded from www.unaids.org

UNAIDS (2005), *Country Situation Analysis*, downloaded from www.unaids.org

UNAIDS (2000), *Innovative Approaches to HIV Prevention*: Geneva.

World Health Organization (2001), *Beyond 2000: Responding to HIV/AIDS in the new millennium*, WHO South-East Asia: New Delhi.

World Health Organization (2004), *HIV/AIDS: Meeting the challenge*, WHO South-East Asia: New Delhi.

World Health Organization (2002), HIV/AIDS Strategic Framework for WHO South – East Asia Region (2002-2006), WHO South-East Asia: New Delhi.