

ABSTRACT OF THE PAPER

Using Educational Media for HIV/AIDS Awareness and Training to School Students in India: Innovative Strategies

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The UN termed HIV/AIDS as one of the biggest global concern and adopted halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS as one of its MDG's. According to UNAIDS, 33.2 million HIV/AIDS infected people exist world wide. The most tragic aspect about AIDS is that half of the infected victims are in the most productive age group of 15-24. Unfortunately, HIV/AIDS has no cure and experts suggest that prevention through education is best approach to fight HIV/ AIDS. They further agree that education to cure, control and prevent AIDS must begin before young people initiate sexual activity. Thus, there is increasing consensus around the world about the need of AIDS education for school students (adolescents) because they have more chances to get infected by HIV virus. Providing HIV/AIDS knowledge and development of attitudes and skills that can limit the spread and impact of the epidemic among adolescents in age group of 10-19 years accounting for 22.8% of the population (230 million) of India is a major challenge. Majority of this age group is studying in schools (primary, middle and secondary level).

Present paper offers possible solutions to face this challenge by adopting the approach that “established educational media in India namely Print, Radio and Television plus relatively emerging one like Internet enabled computer and Mobile telephony can be of immense help to aware and train school students about HIV/AIDS”. Following the principle that educational actions on targeted group (school students) are most effective when reinforced by complimentary educational provision aimed at other people who have an influence on the target group (parents/teachers), a whole-community approach has been adopted for proposed strategies. The paper discusses in detail about the possibilities and strategies for using these educational media for providing HIV/AIDS awareness and training to school students and their parents/ teachers in India.

[FULL VERSION OF THE PAPER](#)

Using Educational Media for HIV/AIDS Awareness and Training to School Students in India: Innovative Strategies

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BACKGROUND

The United Nations (UN) termed Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) as one of the biggest global concern and adopted halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS as one of its Millennium Development Goals. According to UNAIDS (2007) “every day, over 6800 persons become infected with HIV and over 5700 persons die from AIDS, mostly because of inadequate access to HIV prevention and treatment services. The HIV pandemic remains the most serious of infectious disease challenges to public health”. The estimated number of persons living with HIV worldwide in 2007 was 33.2 million and estimated number of deaths due to AIDS in 2007 was 2.1 million worldwide (UNAIDS, 2007). The over whelming majority of people with HIV, some 95% of the global total, live in the developing world. India is one of them as more accurate estimates of HIV indicate that approximately 2.5 million people in India were living with HIV in 2006. Although the proportion of people living with HIV is lower than previously estimated, India’s epidemic continues to affect large numbers of people (UNAIDS, 2007). The UNAIDS Report (2006) estimated that only 7% of Indians who needed anti retroviral drug therapy actually received it last year while only 1.6% of pregnant women who needed treatment to prevent mother to child HIV transmission were receiving it. These estimates reveal that India is facing a tsunami of HIV/AIDS and need better approaches and strategies to provide HIV/AIDS education particularly to young people in the age group of 10-19 years.

HIV/AIDS EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The most tragic aspect about AIDS is that more than 2.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS are less than 15 years of age. The UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS outlined a goal of reducing HIV prevalence by 25% in young people (aged 15–24 years) in the most-affected countries by 2005. National surveys conducted between 1994 and 2006 to assess sexual behavior trends among young people have suggested that prevention efforts are having an impact in several of the most-affected countries (UNAIDS, 2007). Therefore, addressing children and youth during this age period is a real “window of hope” for preventing the spread of HIV (World Bank, 2002). There is further evidence that HIV and AIDS education taught before young people become sexually active does not result in an earlier age of sexual debut, and in fact it may have the opposite effect of delaying the initiation of sexual activity and encouraging protective behavior upon sexual initiation (Kirby 2001, Alford *et al.* 2003, UNAIDS 1997).

In the absence of a vaccine, prevention remains the number one priority. Research from around the world shows that participating in primary and secondary schooling is a critical factor in protecting young people, and especially girls, from HIV infection (UNAIDS 2008). A positive impact can be expected if preventive measures taking place in the school are accompanied by activities carried out within the community (IBE, 2006). Schools and other learning places have an obligation to equip students with these facts and skills for life, including how to avoid coercive and unwanted sex (UNESCO IBE 2004). The challenge remains of finding the most effective way to bring this learning to

adolescents (school students). Unfortunately, the most influential group for students' means parents and teachers in India has social inhibitions and lack HIV/AIDS knowledge. Misra & Agarwal (2005) observes that school teachers do not possess proper knowledge and skills to teach about HIV/AIDS issues.

These observations motivate us to find out strategies to provide HIV/AIDS knowledge and development of attitudes and skills that can limit the spread and impact of the epidemic among adolescents in age group of 10-19 years accounting for 22.8% of the population (230 million) of India. Majority of this age group is studying in 7,10,471 Primary level, 2,62,649 Middle level and 46,796 Secondary level schools (MHRD, 2004). Offering HIV/AIDS awareness education and training to these school going students as well to their parents/teachers is a major challenge. Using educational media for this purpose can be a viable option to face this challenge in India having socio-cultural diversity, sixteen official languages and wide disparities in living standards. .

HIV/AIDS EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL MEDIA

Experience to date suggests that educational media can be applied to achieve better health outcomes and is being used in many developing countries and communities to facilitate remote consultation, diagnosis and treatment (<http://www.healthnet.org/>). Wellings (2000) observed that many European countries developed substantial public education program, making heavy use of mass media, to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic during the 1980s and early 1990s. Harvey et al. (2000) reported that students viewing the Drama program displayed improvements in knowledge and attitudes about HIV and AIDS compared to those receiving written information only. Bull (2001) observed that internet may facilitate health promotion among men who have sex with men and may not be reached in publicly funded STD prevention setting. Kalichman et al. (2003) found that health related internet use was associated with HIV disease knowledge, active coping, information seeking, and social support among persons who were using the internet. Similarly a report published in Plosmedicine (an open access journal, 2006), advocated that Internet may be a promising strategy to deliver low-cost HIV/AIDS risk reduction interventions in resource limited settings with expanding Internet access.

These observations clearly suggest possibilities of using the educational media for HIV/AIDS related information and health benefits among people. Before suggesting strategies to use educational media for HIV/AIDS prevention it is necessary to understand the reach and potential of key educational media in India. The National Readership Study 2006 (NRS 2006) states that Print, Radio, Television, Mobile telephony and Internet enabled computer are key media in India. Considering the severity of AIDS epidemic, it is high time to adopt innovative strategies to use all these media for imparting HIV/AIDS education and training to school students. It is a well established fact educational actions on targeted group (in this case school students) are most effective when reinforced by complimentary educational provision aimed at other people who have an influence on the target group (in this case, their teachers and parents). Following this principle, a whole-community approach has been adopted and proposed strategies to use key educational media for HIV/AIDS education are targeted for school students and their parents/ teachers.

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES TO USE EDUCATIONAL MEDIA FOR HIV/AIDS AWARENESS AND TRAINING

(A) Strategies to use Print Media

According to NRS (2006) “over the last 3 years the number of readers of dailies and magazines has grown to 222 million. Vernacular dailies have grown from to 203.6 million while English dailies have at around 21 million. The reach of magazines was 68 million in 2006”. Misra & Agarwal (2007) reported that newspapers are publishing HIV/AIDS issues and articles in regular intervals but they are required to contribute more considering the killer impact of this disease. In this context, following strategies can be adopted to utilize print medium for HIV/AIDS awareness and training to school students and their parents/ teachers.

(I) For Students

(i) News papers and magazines can publish specific “HIV/AIDS education and training to young people” column. The cuttings of these columns can be placed on library and bulletin board of schools to make students aware and better informed. Publication of relevant articles and quizzes about HIV/AIDS particularly in regional dailies targeting school students may also be helpful to bring awareness.

(ii) Print media can make a difference by giving the epidemic prominent news coverage and dedicating space to HIV/AIDS public service messages. Print Media can also undertake massive campaigns targeting school students to remove myths about HIV/AIDS, awareness of risk and knowledge of how to avoid transmission of AIDS, prevention of HIV/AIDS and development of right attitude towards HIV/AIDS epidemic.

(II) For Parents/Teachers

(i) Print media can play an important and determining role in educating, creating awareness and transmitting crucial information about HIV/AIDS issues so that parents/teachers become aware, remain alert and take measures to prevent its occurrence among their wards/students. This will empower them to teach and train young people about HIV/AIDS issues.

(B) Strategies to use Radio

Radio broadcast, both for information and education, is fairly old in India. Expansion of radio transmission has been rapid, and today there are over 197 radio stations, including 184 full-fledged stations, 10 relay stations and three exclusive commercial radio stations reaching 97.3% of the population and 90% of the geographical area (GOI 2000, 2003). The radio has immense reach in India and radio listening still remains an important source of information for a large number of listeners particularly in rural India. Considering this aspect, following strategies can be adopted to provide HIV/AIDS education through Radio.

(I) For Students

(i) Studies have shown that young people (school students) hesitate to discuss HIV/AIDS issues. Phone-in-programs by Radio can be helpful to counter this problem. In these programs, listeners talk through phones to put up their choices and opinions with

anchors/experts. Through its phone-in-programs, radio can offer medical, social and psychological counseling regarding HIV/AIDS to school students.

(ii) Most of the available literature and material regarding HIV/AIDS provided by national and international agencies is in English. India is a multilingual country and majority of students prefer their local or regional language to obtain educational information. Radio can be of immense help to overcome language barrier for dissemination of HIV/AIDS knowledge. The HIV/AIDS awareness programs broadcasted through radio in regional languages will be helpful for school students to understand HIV/AIDS issues easily and efficiently.

(II) For Parents/Teachers

(i) Seventy percent population of India lives in rural sector and they require information about HIV/AIDS prevention. Radio can help in this aspect. Agriculture is main occupation in rural sector and radio broadcasts a number of programs on agriculture and farming for the benefit of rural population. Giving HIV/AIDS information between agriculture programs will be useful to disseminate HIV/AIDS education to large number of parents/teachers living in rural sector. Afterwards, they will pass on acquired information to their wards/students.

(C) Strategies to use Television

National television, known as Doordarshan in India is the world's largest television network, with 23 channels and 1,314 transmitters dotting the country (Doordarshan 2002). Besides Doordarshan, there are over 150 multilingual private satellite television channels (Satellite and Cable TV 2003) offering news, general entertainment, movies, music and so on to over 87% of the Indian population. Besides Hindi and English, the telecast covers 15 other Indian languages. According to Doordarshan India 2002, 79.3 million homes in the country have television. Television in India has already been used to offer HIV/AIDS education in the form of serials, quizzes, advertisements and awareness programs. The following strategies will be helpful to further utilize the immense potential of television for HIV/AIDS education.

(I) For Students

(i) People in India love to watch soap operas. This tendency of Indian viewers can be exploited for the cause of HIV/AIDS education. The program producers and serial makers for television can be requested to portray one or two characters of HIV/AIDS people in their soap operas and show their lives from different perspectives. This act will enable the school students (prominent viewers of TV) to understand the cause, effects and sufferings behind HIV/AIDS epidemic.

(ii) The teleconferencing mode of television can also be utilized to provide information and counseling to school students to discuss HIV/AIDS issues openly with experts. The television studios can invite experts like medical practitioners, social workers, educationists to counsel on the issues of HIV/AIDS. Students can be asked and encouraged to put up their question and queries to experts by using this facility. The television studios can also organize this conferencing at regional level.

(II) For Parents/Teachers

(i) Now-a-days reality shows on television in India are very popular. These shows have been used to encourage and excel people in different walks of life. Considering this success, reality shows for HIV/AIDS people on television can be organized. These shows will motivate HIV/AIDS people to overcome on stage and share their feelings, emotions and apprehensions with millions of viewers. These shows will motivate parents and teachers to introspect and change their actions and attitudes towards these people. This attitudinal change will sensitize them to talk about AIDS issues with their wards/students.

(D) Strategies to use mobile telephony

Mobile telephony is one of the most used communication means in media. Agarwal (2005) observes that phone networks, including cellular phones, leading to "silent" communication revolution enabling millions to overcome the literacy barrier in communication. Companies and organizations are using mobile signals to endorse their products, services and messages. Considering this aspect, mobile phone offers great opportunity to provide HIV/AIDS education. The following strategies can be adopted for this purpose.

(I) For Students

(i) Mobile in India has been frequently used for Short Messaging Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS). These messages are also available in national and regional languages. The AIDS prevention agencies and organizations can send AIDS awareness/prevention messages to mobile using school students with a request to spread these messages among peers to help humanity and save community. This will trigger chain reaction among mobile using school students to understand and spread HIV/AIDS messages.

(ii) Every mobile company has customer care centre to provide free of cost consultancy to their customers. Taking clue from this scheme, agencies responsible for HIV/AIDS prevention can establish HIV/AIDS care centre via mobile network to provide consultancy and AIDS related information. The interested students can contact these centers by using toll free numbers. This step will be helpful to improve the communication and awareness about AIDS among students. Besides, these centers will also help them to put their queries and apprehensions about HIV/AIDS to experts without disclosing their identity.

(II) For Parents/Teachers

(i) Mobile companies offer the facility of mobile alerts to their customers. Under this facility, they alert their customers about e-mails, latest events and other required information as per the need of the customers. This feature can be used to provide HIV/AIDS awareness and training particularly to parents and teachers. The agencies can use this service to alert the willing parents/teachers about latest information, events and breakthrough's in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention. This information will help them to guide their wards/students about HIV/AIDS issues on regular basis.

(E) Strategies to use internet and computer networks

The Indians are increasingly becoming Internet savvy. A survey by Internet and Mobile Association of India published in Times of India (2005) reports that "Internet penetration has been facilitated by low rates for broadband connection and introduction of affordable PCs which enables the common man to overcome the first obstacle of accessing the Net". The researches world over shows that internet has immense potential and is one of the best medium to spread HIV/AIDS information. Following strategies can be adopted to use internet and computer networks for HIV/AIDS education to school students in India.

(I) For Students

(i) The apex agencies involved with HIV/AIDS epidemic in India can launch specific websites regarding HIV/AIDS information. The websites can also provide 'mail us to ask about HIV/AIDS' option in their web pages. The school students will be main beneficiary from this provision.

(ii) Internet can be used to offer on line HIV/AIDS education program particularly to school students as they need HIV/AIDS education but hesitate to obtain it from their teachers, parents and peers. The internet can come handy for this purpose. The online education program containing safe sexual practices, information about nature and spread of HIV virus, how to safeguard them from AIDS, etc. can be offered through these on line programs.

(II) For Parents/Teachers

(i) With the help of chat rooms and blogs, parents/teachers can form a group to portray their feelings, information and apprehension about sharing HIV/AIDS awareness and training issues with their wards/students. Through this medium, parents/teachers can share their ideas and feelings about issues like reducing infection of sexually transmitted diseases amongst young people, practical steps to ensure that their children understand and practice safe behaviour; better supervision of young people in schools, aspects of school and class management that can promote and enforce responsible behaviour, etc. This exchange of information will empower parents/teachers to train and guide their wards/students about HIV/AIDS prevention.

CONCLUSION

We all know that information is power, and awareness empowers one to protect from HIV/AIDS. The tsunami of HIV/AIDS in India can not be halted only by traditional efforts like informing people with brochures and advertisements. It is high time to utilize tremendous creative and communicating power of mainstream media for AIDS awareness and training to school students and their parents/ teachers. The use of educational media offers immense possibilities to create awareness and transmitting crucial information about HIV/AIDS issues to school students. The researcher has a belief that adoption of proposed strategies in India will be helpful to achieve one of the most crucial MDGs by UN "halting the spread of HIV/AIDS".

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