

Role of NGOs in the Prevention of HIV/ AIDS in Karnataka

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Abstract :Karnataka is designated as one of the “High Prevalence State” in the country as far as HIV/AIDS is concerned. AIDS prevention and control measures were initiated in the state in 1987and state AIDS cell was established in the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare services in 1992. Under the National Aids Control Programme-II (NACP-II) a key aspect of the HIV prevention strategy has been adopted through evidence based design .The target intervention through NGOs is a very crucial component of NACP-II. Thus the Karnataka AIDS society is working with the help of NGO partners in preventing HIV/AIDS. NGOs are working on varied themes like i) care and support centres ii) preventive programmes iii) women in prostitution iv) homosexual men and v) legal approaches to issues raised by HIV/AIDS in the field of interventions.

The main objective of the present study is to analyse the strategies adopted by NGO's in the process of intervention with regard to prevention of HIV/AIDS among high-risk groups in Karnataka. Since Bangalore urban constitutes nearly half of the high risk activities, the NGO's working with regard to intervention in Bangalore based activities have been considered for the study.

The data for the study has been collected from the Directors and the Programme Coordinators of the NGOs working towards the noble cause. An in-depth interview was conducted to collect information on the modalities adopted in implementation and execution of the intervention programme. In addition, the documents and the Information Education and Communication (IEC) material related to the programme were also reviewed. In order to understand the prevalence, high risk activity information were collected from HIV Sentinel Surveillance and Karnataka State Aids Prevention Society (KSAPS) reports.

Findings

The strategies adopted by NGOs in the intervention are peer-group approach, capacity building of the project personnel, condom promotion strategies, accessibility of IEC materials, STD diagnosis & treatment counseling, outreach work strategies and intervention at the community levels.

Peer-group approach – The involvement of peer group in designing and implementing HIV/AIDS messages will make sure that the messages are more relevant to the community and acceptable by the high risk population. They often played a key role in gathering the beneficiaries for awareness camps and also building rapport among the staff and the beneficiaries. Peer educators in these projects are seen as facilitators and key influencers of the community.

Capacity building - Capacity building of the staff by regular training is one of the strategies implemented by most of the NGOs. Issues related to HIV/AIDS prevention, condom promotion, STD diagnosis, treatment and behavioural change communications,

training programmes for the outreach staff included topics on approach and initiation of talk with the clients, and in understanding the clients' behaviour.

Condom promotion Activities - Establishment of condom depots at accessible places was one of the important interventions. Besides free supply of condoms, the condom vending machines were installed in different locations such as pan shops, dhabas, hotels, transport offices, petrol pumps and the project offices.

Accessibility of IEC Materials - The IEC campaign was designed to create awareness and influence individual behaviour. Street plays, folk dances, cinema halls, pamphlets and posters were used as media in the interventions. IEC materials were focused to communicate to the illiterate and low-income high-risk populations.

STD Treatment and Counselling - Almost all the NGO's gave importance for the diagnosis of STD through syndromic recognition and the laboratory testing facilities. Serious attempts are to be made to prevent the STD treatment by trained doctors with appropriate drugs and suitable locations.

Outreach Work Strategies - The outreach workers involve individuals both from high-risk population and general population. Outreach workers were given training in a specific manner with a set of specific education messages, devices and implemented by members of the community. The trained outreach workers know when, where and how to engage high-risk populations in the AIDS prevention campaigns. Outreach workers were trained to establish rapport building, and are also responsible for IEC materials distribution, dissemination of information about condom and STD diagnosis and treatment.

Community Level Interventions - Promotion of safe sex behaviour and eliminating the stigma and discrimination about HIV/AIDS are considered to be important indicators of behavioural change. As a communication strategy, materials could be printed in local languages and also with multilingual capacity.

Other main activities of the NGOs are:

- i. Behavioural change through group educational session,
- ii. Providing information related to sex and sexuality,
- iii. Providing quality STD care,
- iv. Outreach services,
- v. Helping community members to develop prevention strategies, and
- vi. Establishment of Swathi Mane – a centre for interaction and service delivery-services related to health.

They also build focus on building leadership at all levels – leadership is built at a geographic level to ensure management of the local situation and at the thematic level to guide the community on different issues such as violence, savings and credit etc.

Conclusion

In general, the study reveals that NGOs in general have been successful

- i. in mapping locations and spots where high-risk activities take place,
- ii. in building capacity at different levels,
- iii. in building a strong information base so that programmes are evidence-based,
- iv. in creating an enabling environment to facilitate programme implementation, and
- v in identifying potential NGOs partners in selected districts for KSAPS and to provide direction for further action.