

DEVELOPING AIDS AWARENESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN INDIA**A.Srinivasacharlu**

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Abstract

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a condition or state caused by the destruction of body's defense mechanism by the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). As a result of it a set of diseases opportunistically attack the human body finally leading to the death. Hence in medical terminology AIDS is just not considered as a disease but also as the root of all diseases. AIDS has no vaccine and drug to prevent and cure it. Hence it is posing a severe threat to the economy and society as it destroys human resources. Youth and Adolescents are the future lifeline for any society. Adolescents are usually impulsive and prone to take risks as they are easily influenced by their peers and social media and mass media. Even though, the rate of AIDS infection has come down in India, still many concerns remain. As per the recently released, India HIV

Estimation 2015 report, National adult (15–49 years) HIV prevalence in India is estimated at 0.26% (0.22% – 0.32%) in 2015. In addition, most of the adolescents in India have misconceptions about sexuality, HIV, AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) etc. Thus there is a strong need for properly planned AIDS Education at secondary school level in India. The present paper comes out with activities and programmes for imparting AIDS Education at secondary school level in India which can enable the adolescents in developing a stable value system, adopt a responsible life style, acquire and practice life skills to tackle the challenges of HIV and AIDS.

Keywords: *AIDS, HIV, Adolescents and AIDS Education*

Introduction

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a condition caused by the destruction of body's defense mechanism by the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). As a result a set of diseases opportunistically attack the human body finally leading to the death. Hence in medical terminology AIDS is just not considered as a disease but also as the root of all diseases. AIDS is epidemic (the unusual occurrence in a community in high proportion), endemic (constant presence in geographic area) and pandemic (spread over worldwide) in nature. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified AIDS as a behavioural syndrome in 1990. HIV is also called as retro virus, as it is capable of changing the nature of its genetic material. This is how so far there has been no vaccine and drug to prevent and cure AIDS. Hence AIDS is posing a severe threat to the economy and society as it destroys human resources.

The Case of AIDS in India

Third largest HIV infections are found in India which stands at third position in the world in this regard. In India, HIV occurrence was estimated to be 0.26% in 2015. This percentage may appear small compared to other countries, but this amounts 2.1 million HIV infected people in India, whose population is more than 1.2 billion. Around 70,000 people have died due to AIDS in 2015. However, HIV infection is dwindling down in India with a 32% decline in new HIV

infections (86,000 in 2015), and a 54% decline in AIDS-related deaths between 2007 to 2015. (Courtesy: <https://www.avert.org> › Professionals › Around the world › Asia & the Pacific)

As per the recently released, India HIV Estimation 2015 report, National adult (15–49 years) HIV prevalence in India is estimated at 0.26% (0.22% – 0.32%) in 2015. In 2015, adult HIV prevalence is estimated at 0.30% among males and at 0.22% among Females. The HIV epidemic in India is driven by heterosexual sex, which accounted for 87% of new infections in 2015. Different states in India have different vulnerabilities that pave the way for HIV infections. Manipur has the highest estimated adult HIV prevalence of 1.15%, followed by Mizoram (0.80%), Nagaland (0.78%), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (0.66%), Karnataka (0.45%), Gujarat (0.42%) and Goa (0.40%). In addition states like Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Tripura and Tamil Nadu have shown estimated adult HIV prevalence greater than the national prevalence (0.26%), while Odisha, Bihar, Sikkim, Delhi, Rajasthan and West Bengal have shown an estimated adult HIV prevalence in the range of 0.21– 0.25%. All other States/UTs have levels of adult HIV prevalence below 0.20%.

Adolescents and HIV/AIDS

Youth and Adolescents are the future lifeline for any society. In India people in the age group of 15-29 years comprise almost 25 percent of the country's population; however, they account for 31 percent of AIDS burden as per the report by National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) in 2015. This clearly indicates that young people are at high risk of contracting HIV infection. Physiologically, young people are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than adults; girls more than boys. Gender imbalances, societal norms and economic dependence contribute to this risk. Even today, many of the young people and adolescents have misconceptions about the sexuality, HIV and AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) etc. Add to this there is a strong influence of peers, alluring social media and mass media, tendency to experiment and ultra conservative environment which discourages to discuss on sexuality and associated issues makes adds to the misery of adolescents and young people. Hence there is a strong need for developing awareness about sexuality, HIV, AIDS etc. among youth and adolescents.

Role of NACO

NACO, established in 1999 is a division of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provides leadership to HIV/AIDS control programme in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies, and is "the nodal organization for formulation of policy and implementation of programs for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in India". The current programme, National AIDS Control Programme (NACP)–IV (2012-2017), aims to reduce annual new HIV infections by 50% through the provision of comprehensive HIV treatment, education, care and support for the population and take up specific interventions for groups that vulnerable to high rate of HIV infections. A training package on 'AIDS Education in Schools' meant for school teachers was developed by NACO in collaboration with NCERT, UNICEF, UNESCO and other international agencies. The NACO in association with the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) announce recognition and awards for teachers implementing the AIDS Education and Adolescence Education Programme.

AIDS Education

AIDS Education is an educational programme that develops awareness among the students about all the issues related to HIV and AIDS. As a result rational attitude and responsible behaviour are also developed among them towards HIV and AIDS.

Objectives of AIDS Education at Secondary School Level

AIDS Education at secondary school level can have the following objectives. To make the adolescent students to:

- Understand about the physical, physiological, cognitive, social and emotional changes during adolescence.
- Understand the sex, sexuality, sexual maturation and reproduction in girls and boys.
- Learn ways to observe hygiene of the genital organs and menstrual hygiene.
- Understand the consequences of teenage pregnancy.
- Learn about Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) such as gonorrhea, syphilis etc.
- Understand the vocabulary related to HIV and AIDS.
- Understand how HIV can be transmitted and how it cannot be transmitted.
- Understand the symptoms of AIDS.
- Learn the ways of protecting oneself against AIDS.
- Understand about the testing for AIDS.
- Understand the implications of risky behaviour.
- Acquire and practice life skills (adaptive and positive behaviour) like critical thinking; creative thinking; problem solving; decision making; effective communication; interpersonal relationship; self awareness (knowing strengths and weaknesses); coping with emotions; stress management; and empathy.
- Learn the ways to deal with peer pressure and uncomfortable situations.
- Develop the sensitivity towards persons infected with AIDS.
- Help the persons living with HIV/AIDS.
- Involve in anti-AIDS campaign.
- Become agents of change.
- Spearhead AIDS awareness among peers, parents, community members etc.

Imparting AIDS Education at Secondary School Level

AIDS Education can be imparted at secondary school level in India by taking up following activities and programmes

Observance of World AIDS Day

It is an annual day of observance designed to expand and strengthen the worldwide effort to stop AIDS. It is observed on December 1. A talk from expert on AIDS and corresponding issues can be arranged by the school on this day.

Preparation of Visual Material

During AIDS week celebration school should organize for preparing visual materials (models/charts/posters/paintings etc.) depicting message of AIDS awareness to the viewers. A

panel of judges can evaluate the visual material prepared by the students. It will also help in assessing the level of Students knowledge on AIDS.

Essay Competition

It accelerates creative expression within the students. The topics can be 'AIDS as a serious and fatal syndrome', 'AIDS as endemic, epidemic and pandemic' etc. A panel of judges can assess the essays written by students. The best essays can be read out by students in the classroom and they can be included in the school magazine.

Elocution

During the celebration of the World AIDS Week, this activity could be organized in school. This activity enables the students to organize and express the information on HIV/AIDS independently. The topics can be 'AIDS: a challenge to the society', 'Role of social media in the promotion of positive attitude towards AIDS patients'.

Street Play

Street play can be organized on the transmission, symptoms and prevention of AIDS. The teacher can prepare scripts, select professional artists. The play should be ended with a question and answer sessions. The usefulness of the play should be judged by giving a questionnaire to students.

Clinician Talk

In schools NSS and NCC wings under the guidance of teachers can organize this. Doctors specialized in AIDS can be invited. Date, timings and place of this activity has to be intimated in advance. This activity should be ended with question and answer session.

Writing Epigrams

Students should be encouraged to frame/write epigrams or epigraphs. Examples: 'Know AIDS for No AIDS' etc.

Documentaries and Films

Documentaries and films are a potential audio-visual mass media which enormously impact on awareness, attitude, values, decision making and practices among the adolescent students towards AIDS. The documentaries on AIDS from YouTube can be downloaded by the teacher keeping in mind the level of students. While screening them the teacher can follow the steps mentioned below:

- **Planning and Preparation:** The teacher should know the content of the documentaries. Notify the date and time. Lighting, ventilation, seating etc. in the projection hall should be checked. The operation of projector and performance of the screen should also be checked beforehand.
- **During the Screening:** The teacher should ask the students to note down important points and doubts for later discussion. If needed, the teacher can show the documentary again for more clarification.
- **Follow-up Stage:** After the screening the teacher should invite questions, encourage discussion and clarify various points. The teacher has to ensure a fair discussion on the content shown.

Taking up of Projects

Projects help the students to get exposure to the realities of community perception of HIV and AIDS. The teacher can guide the students to do a survey project like study of awareness on HIV and AIDS in a selected locality. For this a questionnaire can be prepared and administered among the community. The analysis of the data in terms of percentage analysis helps the students to analyze the level of awareness on AIDS awareness in the community. Finally the students can be asked to give a summative report on the project.

Collaboration with Agencies

The teacher can collaborate with government agencies, NGOs, media etc. in organizing the programmes and activities to develop awareness on AIDS among students and local community. The agencies prepare and distribute literature and materials and organize the conferences, slide presentation, workshops etc.

Quiz

Quiz is an oral questionnaire used to examine the knowledge of the students on a given topic. For organizing the quiz on HIV and AIDS the teacher should keep the following points in mind: Date and venue; Time and duration; Level and number of the students; and the number of rounds. The teacher can choose the six rounds like – items (simple questions), multiple choice questions; true or false, abbreviation, visual and audio-visual. The quiz can be organized in the following way: Whole class can be divided into three or four groups which can be named with suitable names. Each team should be asked to nominate a captain; scorer and time keeper can be selected among students; For the rounds like simple questions, abbreviation, visual and audio-visual, the first team to which the question is asked will get 30 seconds to answer. If they answer, they can be awarded with two points, in case if the question gets passed and answered by other teams, they can be awarded with a bonus point; For the rounds like multiple choice questions and true or false there should be no passing; At the end of the every round the score has to be declared. Finally at the end of the quiz the winners should be announced.

Other Co-Curricular Activities

- Silent rally with banner under the guidance of teacher.
- Organizing Seminars, Debate and Discussion on AIDS awareness.
- Organizing Workshops on AIDS awareness.
- Visits to the hospitals.
- Organizing the talks by social workers and non-governmental organizations.
- Collecting photographs on AIDS, HIV, STD, Human Physiology etc.

Role of the Teacher in AIDS Education

The secondary school teacher should be a prime source in taking up more initiatives to develop and promote AIDS awareness among adolescent students:

- The teacher should be a best source to provide accurate information related to sex, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, STD etc.
- He/She needs to gain the trust and confidence of students.

International Conference on School Mental Health

- He/She should be an agent of change and spearhead AIDS education.
- He/She should be non-judgmental.
- He/She should have understanding and compassion towards the needs and problems of adolescents.
- He/She should be impartial and have patience in dealing with the students problems and questions.
- If the problems of the students are beyond the capabilities of the teacher, then he/she should refer them to professionals like doctor, counselors etc.
- He/She should be amiable with the parents/guardians and family members of the students.
- He/She should up-to-date about HIV/AIDS, Adolescent needs and problems etc.
- He/She should be efficient in organizing the activities meant for promoting the AIDS awareness among the school students.

Conclusion

Most young people become sexually active during adolescence. In the absence of right guidance and information at this stage they are more vulnerable to high risk behavior in their everyday life. Education, counseling and behavior modification are the corner stone's for preventing HIV infection. Beside governments and NGOs, schools and teachers need to take up more initiatives to develop AIDS awareness among adolescent students so that they can develop a stable value system and adopt a responsible life style. The schools and teachers also have to take the confidence of parents and local community in addressing the menace of AIDS.

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