

HIV and Personal Hygiene Education to High School Students in Southern India

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Purpose

Education about sex, sexually transmitted diseases, and personal hygiene is uncommon in southern India. Efforts to mandate sex education in high schools have not been successful due to opposition from parents and officials. It is problematic that, even though resources such as hospitals, physicians, medications, and condoms are readily available, the population of Namakkal lacks a thorough education about HIV risk and spread. The purpose of the project was to educate 10th-12th standard students [ages 14-18] about the spread of STIs, how to take measure to protect themselves, and provide information to assist in accessing appropriate health care providers.



Background

2.5 million people in India are infected with HIV.

While the nationwide incidence of adults living with the infection is 0.36%, prevalence varies between states. The district of Namakkal in the state of Tamil Nadu has a disproportionately high incidence of HIV because it lies on a popular trucking route. Drivers spend up to six months away from their homes and can acquire HIV from sex workers. Truckers then return home to their wives, causing these women to suffer from an increased rate of HIV. For this reason, this region is an excellent target for an HIV education program.

Despite the substantial number of Indians living with the infection, knowledge regarding HIV and other sexually transmitted infections is lacking. Additionally, for Indian females, information regarding menstrual management is not generally addressed; during their menstrual period their ability to participate in daily activities such as school or work is often compromised.

Methods

Five government schools in the district of Namakkal participated:
2 all-male
2 all-female
1 mixed gender

Sessions were single sex.

All attending students in the 10th, 11th, and 12th standard grades participated; their ages ranged from 14-18 years.

Topics included:
- HIV transmission
- Myths and stigma surrounding HIV
- Sexually transmitted infections

In the all-female sessions, the topics of menstrual hygiene and management were additionally addressed.

The information was conveyed through pictures and words written in the local Tamil language. Because of language restraints, the presentation was given in English and then translated into Tamil by a local HIV counselor.



Results and Summary

In total, 3,274 students attended the education sessions.

4 students were later seen at the clinic for HIV testing and STI treatment. Community feedback was positive and steps are currently being taken to continue the project in other schools by local hospital staff.

Previous interventions and studies in the same district indicated that knowledge about HIV increases and stigma decreases after an educational session. HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and issues surrounding personal hygiene are significant barriers to personal and community development, and protecting youth through educational interventions is a key step to improving health globally. This project was an effective tool to educate a large and susceptible population about sexual behaviors and risks.

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