CHAPTER 16

Pakistan

Integrated Health Services

*Project title:* Advocacy Campaign to Reduce AIDS Stigma by Creating “HIV Forums” at Colleges in Islamabad

*Implementing organization:* Integrated Health Services (IHS)

*Location:* Islamabad

**Background**

*Program goals:* To raise awareness among university students about HIV, AIDS, and stigma and discrimination and to work toward promoting stigma reduction in the general community

*Target audience:* University and college students 17 to 25 years of age

*Primary approaches:* Organization of HIV youth forums, sensitization and training of youth forum members, community sensitization by youth forum members

*Description of intervention:* The project team mapped local private colleges and universities in Islamabad that might consider forming HIV youth forums. The team developed an introductory letter including a summary of the project for the director of the Federal Directorate of Education and
the secretary of education and met with the two officials to obtain their approval of the project. The team then selected 12 schools that met the following eligibility criteria: (a) the schools served students 17 years of age and older and (b) implementation of a successful program seemed feasible given student interests and strengths. When the final 12 schools were selected, project staff members visited the schools and met with college and university officials. A faculty member or teacher on staff at each school was designated as the HIV youth forum coordinator.

Once the teams had been selected and the coordinator identified, project staff members visited all 12 schools to provide information about the project to deans, principals, and student affairs administrators. Project activities were scheduled at that time in coordination with the school calendar. Such activities included the project staff’s presentation on HIV, AIDS, stigma, and discrimination. Visits began in September 2008, and by January 2009, all of the schools had been visited and the first presentation by the project team had been conducted. In mid-January, training of forum participants began. Some delay occurred in scheduling the trainings because of school examination schedules. Student forum members were provided an information booklet and fact sheet about HIV and AIDS as well as handouts, which were distributed during the project staff presentations at each school. Following the training, HIV student forum members created awareness among their peers, friends, families, and community about HIV and AIDS by holding awareness-raising sessions and one-on-one discussions. Forum members also arranged creative activities such as dramas, speech contests, and theater performances on themes related to HIV and stigma in their respective colleges and universities. They also performed voluntary activities providing counseling to people living with HIV and their families.

**Implementation, Results, and Challenges**

*Measurement strategies:*

- Pre- and postintervention surveys were conducted among a random sample of students at five Islamabad colleges and universities. The survey assessed knowledge and attitudes regarding HIV and AIDS, level of awareness of stigma and what it means, and attitudes of students toward people living with HIV and AIDS. Students provided informed consent before participating in the surveys. In total, 462 students were surveyed at baseline and 445 were surveyed following the intervention.
- Monthly report forms were completed by HIV youth forum coordinators.
- Registration forms were completed.
Results, key findings, and lessons: Overall, 1,674 students attended the HIV-awareness presentations, of whom 362 became members of the HIV student forums at the 12 universities. By the end of the project, more students had joined, for a total of 443 youth forum members. Eleven students participated in individual counseling sessions with people living with HIV. In addition to holding monthly awareness sessions, all 12 forums engaged in other activities related to HIV themes, such as speech competitions, dramas, and theatrical performances. The 12 forums held a total of 13 such events. The key lesson learned was that youth in Pakistan are an appropriate audience for reproductive health education, including awareness about HIV and stigma, and can be actively involved in community sensitization activities. The tremendous energy of youth and students can be harnessed to increase health awareness by creating and organizing forums, clubs, or societies at colleges and universities.

The evaluation indicated increases in general knowledge about HIV, AIDS, and stigma. In addition, the fear of HIV infection through casual contact with a person living with HIV and the shame and blame directed toward people living with HIV decreased by the end of the project. For example, at baseline, 16 percent of students surveyed stated that they had heard of the word *stigma* compared with 60 percent at end line. Similarly, 84 percent provided a correct definition for HIV at end line, compared with 51 percent at baseline. Knowledge of antiretroviral therapy also increased substantially. Although at baseline 25 percent of students agreed that “people with HIV and AIDS should feel ashamed of themselves,” only 9 percent agreed with that statement at end line. In addition, at baseline 32 percent of students were afraid of becoming infected with HIV by sharing plates or utensils with a person living with HIV, compared with 10 percent following the intervention. The percentage of students who reported speaking with their family about HIV and AIDS increased substantially over the course of the project (from 27 percent at baseline to 91 percent at end line), which indicates that increasing awareness of HIV, AIDS, and stigma among students can provide an important entry point for informing families about these critical issues.

Challenges and unforeseen outcomes: Convincing the administrators and students of private colleges and universities to take part in the cause of creating awareness among the community about HIV and AIDS was difficult. This difficulty stemmed from concern that starting HIV youth forums and creating awareness would expose students to sex and reproductive
health education, which in Pakistan is still considered something educational institutions should not do. To overcome this challenge, IHS met numerous times with the administrators to convince them that professional educators have a critical role to play in ensuring that students have correct scientific information about sexual health and HIV and are provided with this information in an ethical and truthful manner.

**Additional Information**

*Program references, media coverage, and materials developed:*

- “Fast Facts” sheet for members
- Youth forum HIV information booklet

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*Additional funding, replication, or scale-up opportunities or new partnerships resulting from the project:* IHS is currently working to develop a reproductive health syllabus for teachers to enable them to be a continuous and consistent source of reproductive health information for students. Teachers are the main focus of this effort because previous experience has shown that universities and parents are much more supportive if such issues are addressed internally rather than by bringing in outside experts to provide such information. IHS is also planning to educate journalists to highlight the importance of including reproductive health curricula in schools and colleges.

**New Light AIDS Control Society**

*Project title:* Reducing Stigma to Improve Uptake for Antiretroviral Treatment and Community Home-Based Care among People Living with HIV and AIDS, Men Who Have Sex with Men, and Individuals from the Transgender Community

*Implementing organizations:* New Light AIDS Control Society (NLACS)

*Location:* Karachi, Lahore, and Multan districts

*Background*

*Program goals:* To increase access of people living with HIV and men who have sex with men (MSM) to antiretroviral treatment and community home-based care without stigma and discrimination
Target audiences: MSM, people living with HIV, transgender individuals, key stakeholders

Primary approach: Training of trainers

Description of intervention: The project involved training of trainers on HIV, AIDS, and stigma for MSM, individuals from the transgender community, and their friends and relatives. Of the 24 persons trained, 16 went on to become master trainers. The master trainers then trained a total of 390 other MSM and transgender individuals on HIV-related issues in 26 training sessions held during the project period. Master trainers also led seminars for health care providers and media personnel.

The NLACS staff worked to establish or strengthen referral systems and links for treatment and care services for these marginalized groups. The referral systems were strengthened through regular meetings with health care providers. In addition, structured awareness campaigns on HIV and AIDS were organized within the target community. Ten case studies exploring the everyday issues and problems faced by MSM and people living with HIV were prepared and disseminated in Urdu and English among important stakeholders, including MSM and people living with HIV, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the general public, and government institutions. Last, English-language classes were offered to interested MSM and transgender individuals as a way to enhance capacity.

Implementation, Results, and Challenges

Measurement strategies:

- Baseline and end-line surveys were conducted to assess the project’s effect.
- Pre- and posttraining evaluations were conducted among the master trainers and the additional trainees.
- In-depth interviews were conducted with 26 selected MSM, transgender individuals, and people living with HIV at target locations in Lahore, Multan, and Karachi to develop case studies.
- NLACS completed monthly activity progress reports.

Results, key findings, and lessons: Following the structured awareness-raising campaigns among MSM and transgender communities, 377 individuals visited the NLACS offices for voluntary counseling and testing (VCT). They also received information on HIV and AIDS during
counseling sessions. Of those who were tested, 16 were diagnosed as HIV-positive and linked with the home-based care services provided by NLACS. These services included twice-monthly home-based care visits. A total of 64 home visits were conducted, during which 90 family members of the 16 people living with HIV and MSM were sensitized on HIV and AIDS.

In four separate seminars, 46 media personnel and 43 health care workers were provided with basic information about MSM and transgender individuals, such as the distinction between these two groups and the challenges and obstacles they face, including their specific health care needs. These seminars led to enhanced cooperation and support from both the media personnel and the health care workers. For example, media personnel made commitments to reduce stigma and discrimination through more accurate reporting in print and broadcast media and agreed to receive news stories and information from NLACS for dissemination.

Efforts to strengthen ties with local hospitals and VCT centers, both public and private, expanded the NLACS referral system to 36 villages and included the addition of seven hospitals and one VCT center. Building links, promoting VCT, and providing home-based visits all increased identification of those who needed services and ensured links to care and treatment. According to monitoring data, demand for condoms increased dramatically over the project period. A total of 26,746 condoms were distributed in the MSM and transgender communities through awareness-raising campaigns, meetings, and training sessions and during monitoring visits.

Overall, the project raised awareness within the MSM and transgender communities about HIV and AIDS and available treatment and care services. In addition, the project provided space for discussion and reflection through workshops with peer master trainers in each district. Involvement of leaders from the community of MSM in the implementation process promoted interest and meaningful participation and made possible wide dissemination of messages about HIV, stigma, and related issues.

Of trained MSM and transgender individuals, 60 percent reported to the NLACS monitoring team that their attitude had improved and that they had gained the confidence needed to handle situations related to stigma and discrimination from the local community.

Two press conferences, one in Lahore and one in Karachi, were organized by NLACS and Action Aid–Pakistan to discuss MSM and transgender issues. A large number of MSM and transgender individuals
participated in these events and confidently expressed their concerns and problems in front of electronic and print media representatives.

Following are some of the basic results from the evaluation data collected among MSM and transgender groups before and after the intervention:

- Initially, the target groups were reluctant to talk about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV and AIDS issues. However, they gradually gained confidence and were eager to learn about STIs, and they convinced their friends and partners to learn about these issues.
- At baseline, usage of condoms and lubricant was quite low, but almost all respondents reported using condoms consistently at end line.
- At baseline, participants were afraid of being identified as HIV positive, but at end line, respondents not only came for testing, but those who identified as HIV positive also began using antiretroviral treatment services.
- As a result of this intervention, most of the targeted members suggested that such programs should continue because many people still do not have accurate information about HIV and AIDS.
- At baseline, many respondents were reluctant to go to doctors because of the discriminatory attitude toward MSM and transgender individuals. However, at end line, those sensitized are now more willing to take their partners to doctors for VCT and treatment services.

**Challenges and unforeseen outcomes:** Many of the master trainers had full-time jobs and could not conduct trainings during the day, so training sessions were scheduled on weekends to accommodate trainers with full-time employment. Fluency in English was limited among the MSM and transgender individuals involved in the project. Therefore, the project team translated training material into Urdu for these target groups. The project staff observed that inability to speak and read English posed obstacles for some in accessing care and in gaining permanent employment. Although the project offered an English certificate course, only five participants enrolled and received certificates. The project staff decided to continue this component despite low uptake.

Initially, people living with HIV hesitated to share their problems with the staff, but after the sensitization and home-based care visits, they now have the confidence to talk about problems they are facing.
**Additional Information**

Program references, media coverage, and materials developed:

- Four-day training manual for MSM master trainers on HIV and STIs
- The training manual *Dost se Dost ko Taleem* (*Education from One Friend to Another*)
- Media coverage on World AIDS Day when the “Silent Words” case study was launched

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Additional funding, replication, or scale-up opportunities or new partnerships resulting from the project: In Karachi, MSM and transgender individuals formed a group called Participatory Organisation for Empowerment of Transgender (POET) to advocate and inform the government and local community on the rights of MSM and transgender individuals.

NLACS is currently seeking support from the U.S. Agency for International Development and others to continue and scale up the project activities piloted.

**Pakistan Press Foundation**

**Project title:** Capacity Development of Media and Civil Society Organizations to Improve Coverage of HIV/AIDS

**Implementing organization:** Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)

**Location:** Abbottabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Nathia Gali, Quetta, and Sukkur

**Background**

**Program goals:** To reduce stigma and discrimination against HIV in Pakistan (and Pakistan-administered Kashmir) society through capacity development of the media and civil society organizations (CSOs), leading to improved coverage of HIV and effective use of mass media

**Target audiences:** National media, CSOs, journalists

**Primary approach:** Media coverage

**Description of intervention:** The PPF sought to build the capacity of civil society professionals in Pakistan to work effectively with mass media in reducing HIV-related stigma and discrimination. The PPF organized five
three-day training workshops on “Working with the Media” for CSOs in the cities of Abbottabad, Karachi, Lahore, and Quetta, and 119 civil society professionals participated in the training. The workshops for CSOs included NGOs working with groups at high risk for HIV, NGOs working with adolescents, and NGOs involved in general awareness-raising activities. The purpose of the workshops was to train NGO personnel how to cooperate with the media on their activities. Workshops included a panel discussion with experienced journalists from both the print and electronic media and taught participants to develop press releases and letters to the editor.

The PPF also sought to raise awareness of journalists and develop their capacity and writing skills for news reporting and feature writing on issues related to HIV and stigma and discrimination. The PPF organized five three-day awareness-raising workshops for local journalists in the cities of Karachi, Multan, Nathia Gali, and Sukkur. The workshops included (a) expert presentations to improve participants’ knowledge of various aspects of HIV, (b) sessions on ethical issues and media guidelines for reporting on HIV, (c) discussions of what constitutes stigma and discrimination broadly with practical exercises depicting stigma through pictures and the participants’ own experience of stigma, and (d) discussions with HIV-positive people about their actual experiences of stigma and discrimination. The workshops focused in parallel on building skills in news and feature writing.

**Implementation, Results, and Challenges**

*Measurement strategies:* All training participants were asked to take pre- and postknowledge tests and to fill out evaluation forms after each activity.

In pre- and posttests designed for journalists, questions assessed knowledge of the abbreviations related to HIV and AIDS, the prevalence of HIV in the world and in Pakistan, misused terms associated with HIV and AIDS, the general behavior of the public toward people living with HIV, and information about prevention. Questions in the pre- and posttests designed for NGO participants assessed knowledge of media (for example, the meaning of terms such as *intro, embargo, deadline, caption, news sense, press conference, interview, media plan*, and *follow-up*). Each questionnaire had 15 questions. For the journalists, the average pretest score was 4.6, and the average posttest score was 12.1; for the NGO participants, the average pretest score was 2.6, and the average posttest score was 13.7.

*Results, key findings, and lessons:* The PPF developed the capacity of 119 civil society professionals and 104 journalists in the training workshops.
As part of the workshops, each of the 104 journalist participants was to complete a feature article on HIV-related stigma and discrimination over the three-day period of the forum, starting with the outline at the end of the first day and continuing with discussion and finalization of the article by the end of the workshop. From the workshops, the journalists produced 107 feature articles, and the CSO representatives produced 187 press releases and letters to the editor in addition to 18 newsletters on issues related to HIV. The PPF obtained 31 published clippings of feature articles written by participants and 43 published stories about the events organized under the program. The PPF estimates the total number of published stories was at least twice the number of clippings received.

Overall, project successes included improved knowledge as a result of the workshop, an increase in the number of articles on HIV featured in local newspapers, and improved skills of NGO personnel in interacting and engaging with the media on HIV-related issues.

Challenges and unforeseen outcomes: Challenges identified by the PPF included managing open discussions with very conservative religious participants, who often raised objections to the content. Able resource persons who were also well versed in religious teachings and could use these teachings to support some key points were used to manage these challenges.

Because so little had been written about HIV in Pakistan, the PPF had difficulty initially identifying journalists who had experience writing about these issues. The PPF researched English and Urdu newspapers to look for journalists who had written news items, articles, or features on HIV. It was eventually able to identify and bring 104 journalists and reporters working for local newspapers across all provinces as well as the national papers to participate in the workshops.

Additional Information

Program references, media coverage, and materials developed: A list of the following materials developed is available on request:

- 31 published articles
- 47 unpublished articles
- 58 letters to the editor
- 55 press releases.
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Additional funding, replication, or scale-up opportunities or new partnerships resulting from the project: The PPF worked closely with local representatives of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), which was very impressed by the quality of training. The UNAIDS country representative visited the PPF in December 2009 and expressed interest in working with the PPF to develop a training program for journalists on raising awareness of HIV and AIDS.