



Promoting SRH services to improve HIV prevention for young female sex workers

Experience from the Abhaya programme in India

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Background

Young female sex workers (FSW < 24 years old) are marginalised, and often difficult to reach with HIV-related services. It has also been observed that women who have been in sex work have various sexual health issues that go undiagnosed and therefore untreated.

Description

India HIV/AIDS Alliance has implemented the Abhaya project in Gujarat, Delhi and Telangana states to provide sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to FSW for the last three years (July 2013 to June 2016) with funding support from MAC AIDS Fund. It explored the viability of SRH as an entry point for HIV-related service delivery.

Young FSW below 24 years of age were reached through health camps, hotspot meetings and drop-in-centres by outreach workers, in coordination with government-funded Targeted Intervention (TI) HIV prevention sites. The project provided SRH education, counselling/referral and service linkages with family planning clinics, gynaecologists and STI clinics. Clients were also motivated to seek and were referred for HIV services, including HIV testing and ART.

Sexual & Reproductive Health Services (July 2013 -March 2016)	Clients Counsellled	Clients Availing Service
Oral Pills	414	209
Copper-T/IUD	145	37
Injectable/Implants	22	4
Emergency Contraception	191	76
Abortion	144	54
Post-abortion care counselling	44	27
Pregnancy		
ANC	114	48
Delivery	32	14
PNC	23	9
Cervical Cancer (Pap smear test)	211	83
Menstruation Hygiene Management Information and Counselling	477	211
Infertility	15	8

Lessons learned

Education on HIV and SRH services

4,626 women in sex work were registered with the Abhaya project and educated on SRH and HIV-related services. Of them, 24% (1,102) are hard to reach young FSWs (< 24 years old).

Counselling services

Project clients were mainly counselled on oral birth control (n=411), menstruation hygiene management (n=477), and cervical cancer (n=211).

SRH service utilisation

The most commonly availed services in the project were oral birth control (n=209), mensuration support (n=211), emergency contraception pills (n=58), and cervical cancer Pap smear testing (n=83).

HIV service utilisation

Reaching out to FSW with SRH services resulted in an increased uptake of HIV prevention services. A total of 63 young women in sex work who were not registered within the Targeted Intervention programme were identified through SRH services and linked to HIV services. Twelve of them were diagnosed with HIV and linked through the project to ART centres and Vihaan Care & Support Centers.

Conclusions/Next steps

Reaching out to young FSW via an SRH approach was successful as it created an enabling environment for SRH discussions among a population that is still grappling with challenges of adulthood and sexuality.

These discussions led to increased HIV counselling, testing and linkages with care, support and treatment services.

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