

Report on training of journalists about basic facts on HIV and AIDS



WOMEN'S FORUM FOR RESEARCH AND TRAINING (WFRT)

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PROGRESSIO

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1) Introduction

The media anywhere in the world whether print, audio or visual plays a major role of informing the masses. It also acts as a watchdog for society. Journalists are the tools the media makes use of to look out for the truth and disseminate it to the masses as the truth and nothing but the truth. However to do this effectively they need to be up to date and informed.

Although HIV and AIDS is of major concern to the world, it has in some cases remained under reported or in others not covered at all and where it is covered, it is not presented with facts thus misleading. To avert this situation, Women's Forum for Research and Training (WFRT) in collaboration with Progressio – Yemen as part of its ongoing awareness campaign organised a 3 day informative workshop aimed at increasing the knowledge of journalists about HIV and AIDS and their role in general awareness which will in due course create an enabling environment that favours and protects the rights of People Living with HIV and in so doing working against stigma and discrimination.

Workshop Facilitators

These included:

1. Kasozi Silvester - HIV and AIDS Trainer
2. Rasha Abdulwahab - Local Counterpart
3. Dr Saeed Al Sharabi - Guest speaker

Participants

This workshop drew participants from different media houses that included newspapers and radio. It attracted 17 of them in number (12 men and 5 women). These were mobilized with the help of a journalist that WFRT has worked with before in their Human Rights Programmes.

2) THE TRAINING

Welcome Remarks

The workshop was opened by the Director of WFRT Dr Suad Al Gedsa who gave an overview of WFRT's work in HIV and AIDS as embedded within its partnership with Progressio. She highlighted the fact that the media plays a big role in informing the public and it is because of this opportunity that it was hoped they would also go a long way in educating the masses about the pandemic after this training. She also called upon them to highlight and raise the profile of the work of WFRT and Progressio. She introduced the workshop's facilitators, thanked all for coming and wished everyone well.

Ground rules

Participants raised what they felt should be the guiding principles of the workshop in order to maintain order such that all would go well. These among others included;

- Avoid interrupting others
- Silencing or where possible switching off phones
- Avoiding unnecessary talking
- Keeping time
- Following the workshop objectives

Facilitation Methodologies

The following methods were used in facilitating the workshop;

- Audio visuals (power point and videos)
- Visual aids (posters)
- Group discussions
- Mini Lectures

Participants' expectations

Participants were asked to voice their expectations of the workshop and the following came out as their views. These were

- ✚ Nothing new except the same information about the disease, the ways of transmission, prevention
- ✚ Bringing some people who are living with HIV in the workshop
- ✚ A focus more on the rights of PLHIV
- ✚ How to form or establish support groups for PLHIV
- ✚ Getting information
- ✚ knowing more about the legitimistic aspects for those who were infected medically and if there is any laws to help those people and suit those who caused them this situation
- ✚ Getting out of the training with recommendations.

The goal of the training

To sensitise the media and journalists on basic facts about HIV and AIDS, their role in awareness, protection of rights of people living with HIV and fighting against stigma and discrimination.

Training Objectives

The training objectives were drawn from the broad goal of the training. It was envisaged that by the end of the training participants should be able to;

1. Explain what HIV and AIDS is, how its spread and prevented
2. Explore the role media in creating awareness about HIV and AIDS.
3. Explain what the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS are and the relevance of protecting them.
4. Explain the relationship between stigma and discrimination and devise ways of fighting it.

Sessions

The training was divided into several sessions each with its own objectives. These were as follows

Day 1

On day our focus was mainly focused on the epidemiology of HIV and AIDS as an issue. Different sub topics were covered in the day's sessions. These were;

- Assessment of the level of knowledge of participants about HIV and AIDS
- The meaning of HIV and AIDS

- The difference between HIV and AIDS
- Misconceptions about the origin of HIV
- The different stages of HIV progression
- Diagnosis of HIV in the body and its implication
- Explain the effects of HIV on the human body (video clip)
- Statistical information about the HIV and AIDS situation in Yemen

After going through the basics of HIV and AIDS, we split the participants into two groups to deal with the questions as presented here below

Group 1

What factors do you think accelerate one's progression from the stage of infection with HIV to developing AIDS?

- Malnutrition
- Smoking
- Drugs
- Bad health care
- Failure to adhere to prescribed drugs
- Failure to discover the infection early
- Having other Infections other besides HIV
- Stress
- Discrimination and stigma
- Re-infection by involving ones self in risky behaviors
- Chewing chat

Group 2

Identify ways by which you can identify a person who has HIV or AIDS.

- Blood test
- Losing weight
- Yellowing in the face
- Skin rash
- Coughing + flu+ headache
- Vomiting
- Shortage of CD4 cells to 200 or less
- General weakness in the body
- Diarrhea lasts for more than one month.

Observation:

The participants seemed rather knowledgeable of some of the basics of HIV and AIDS. However looking at their presentation here above and more they had a lot of information but in generalized forms that could in many ways lead to mythical presentations. One particular issue that took us all by surprise was the attribution of chewing qat to the factors that accelerate progression of HIV to AIDS stage. Also there was a lot of contention by participants as to where HIV originated from. In fact at one point one participant said out loudly that he thought from this workshop he would get to know where exactly HIV and AIDS came from (The same participant who said that he did not expect to learn anything new).

The group work as seen above and well as all the questions that arose thereof are a good platform of people to express what they really know and it thus gave us the opportunity to rectify all the misconceptions about HIV and AIDS especially knowing that they could in turn pass on just as much to their audiences. So issues around signs as symptoms had to be clarified with regard to the fact that anyone can present with those signs even when they do not have HIV and that Qat although may cause some digestive or gastric problems, is not a proven reason for the acceleration of the progress of HIV to AIDS.

Day 2

Day 2 began with an overview of the previous day's sessions with participants highlighting what they learned especially that which was new. In the same way the facilitators also gave feedback about the evaluation of day 1 by participants.

Modes of transmission

Objectives

- Modes of HIV transmission (Taso game and group work)
- Prevention of HIV and AIDS (Group work)
- Factors that make women more vulnerable to HIV infection
- STD/STIs and their relationship with HIV and AIDS (Power Point by Dr Saeed Al Sharabi)

Group I:

What factors make men more vulnerable to HIV infection than women?

- More fond of using sharp instrument like shaving instruments, circumcision.
- Migrant work
- Nature of jobs (truck drivers, fishermen...)
- Road accident (Frequent travelers)
- poverty and unemployment
- lack of awareness

Group II:

What factors make women more vulnerable to HIV infection than men?

- Culture (prevents women for seeking services/information and speaking out
- Polygamy
- Poverty
- Divorce
- Giving birth to children in the health centers
- High illiteracy/Ignorance among women
- Raping
- Lack of centers specializing in health care of PLHIV

After the first set of group work, participants in the same groups were given the questions below to come up with appropriate responses

Group I:

Identify the ways through which HIV can be transmitted

- Blood
- Sexual transmission
- From mother to child transmission

- Sharp instruments which are not sterilized (shaving instruments, needles, injections, surgical instruments)
- Organ transplants from a person to another.

Group II:

Write down the ways through which HIV transmission can be prevented

- Checking for HIV in blood before transmission
- Avoiding the use of unsterilised instruments in health facilities
- Making periodical test for a person to know his or her status
- Avoiding sharing of sharp unsterilised instruments
- Avoiding any illegal sex intercourses
- Raising awareness among young people
- Encouraging young people to get married by making it easy (making it cheaper).

Observations:

The Taso game that meant to show the multiplicity effect of HIV did well is showing participants how HIV can explode from a few tens to hundreds and even thousands. The fact that we as facilitators took part in it showed that all of us are vulnerable to infection.

Also looking above at participants responses they seem to be so much pre occupied with the transmission of HIV through blood something that trickles down to prevention; they only look at blood to blood prevention strategies. Sexuality on the whole is overlooked whether it is because of cultural reasons, it remains to be seen for even when it is mentioned it is referred to as “illegal sex” in the context of pre-marital sex.

It was thus important to clarify that even in marriage infection can occur and that illegality of sex is relative for others it could include adultery, rape, defilement, homosexuality or even lesbianism.

On the other hand only the A -Abstinence, approach is stressed, leaving out the B and C for being faithful (even in polygamy’s case) and the condom for both pre-marital and marriage sex.

Day 3

Day 3 also begun with a review of Day where upon all were in agreement that there was a lot of murmuring and interruptions as others gave their opinions about the day’s sessions. It was then agreed to fine each one who would interrupt when someone was talking upon which the money collected would be given to the person dealing with the workshop’s logistics. This worked wonders for the day as their was maximum discipline despite fining some participants The day’s sessions included;

- Human Rights and People living with HIV
- Stigma and Discrimination
- Types of Stigma
- Causes and effects of Stigma
- How can we fight stigma and discrimination?

Group I: The group of fighting stigma

1. What are the causes of stigma and discrimination on people living with HIV?

- Lack of awareness about the disease
- Looking down at the person
- Lack of acceptance from the society towards PLHIV
- Culture
- Self stigmatizing
- Prejudging PLHIV i.e that they have been infected because of indulging themselves in a sinful behavior.

Group II: Friends of People Living With HIV

2. What are the effects of stigma and discrimination on people living with HIV?

- Psychological effects(isolation, depression ,negative thoughts, loss of self esteem, shame , suicidal tendencies)
- Social effects (introversion, divorce, avoiding him from participation in social and public life, making fun of them, mockery at them.
- Economic effect (demeans human beings, reduction in productivity).

Group III:

3. What role can the media play in fighting stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV and AIDS in Yemen?

- Fighting negative phenomena that establish and reinforce stigma
- Highlighting rights for those people through writing articles ,seminars, workshops,
- Making surveys about people attitudes towards PLHIV
- Involving the civilian organizations in fighting stigma
- Clarifying the ways of transmission
- Highlighting the suffering of PLHIV while maintaining confidentiality
- Focusing on ethical aspects of dealing with PLHIV.
- Trying to involve PLHIV in society and public life
- Advocating for establishing laws to guard against stigma and discrimination of PLHIV
- Advocating for establishing a national day for fighting stigma.
- Involving PLHIV in workshops of training and rehabilitation.
- Highlighting the necessity to establish more VCT centers to help PLHIV.

Observations:

From the above it is clear that for some reason the questions were largely understood although the groups went a little bit of the hook in some of their answers.

What was most striking about this session was that participants especially when it came to rights of people living with HIV they got to know another dimension of it. The relation of hitherto known rights to the situation of people living with HIV opened eyes of many and arose many questions as to whether Yemen had any laws to defend the well being of PLHIV. This became the basis of many of their plans which included writing about and advocating for the rights of PLHIV.

The issue of stigma was rather touching as in this particular session one participant came out boldly to express her dislike of the way she is treated as an outcast in Sana'a because she hails from Taiz. This in many ways helped bring to light what stigma really is and we used this example to refer to the plight of PLHIV.

Looking at the group you could realize that the message sunk because participants even named their groups "The group of fighting stigma" and "Friends of People Living with HIV". This was their own initiative and it speaks volume of their change in attitude regarding people living with HIV. We hope they will be able to translate this into their journalism work.

Further to the above the journalists came up with a statement that they agreed they should on as issues they will push for the ought the media especially around a new HIV and AIDS strategy for HIV and AIDS for the country and advocating for rights of PLHIV

F) CONCLUSION

The workshop ended without much incidence. As seen above there was a considerable rectification of many mythical issues but most importantly was the ability for the journalists to identify with issues surrounding stigma which will be very essential for them to vocal out the concerns raised in the workshop with regard to what is keeping HIV and AIDS programmes in Yemen lagging behind.