

## The Effect of Participatory Education on Attitude of School Personnel Towards HIV/AIDS

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**Abstract:** School personnel's knowledge and attitude towards HIV/AIDS have a great role in students' knowledge of and attitude to this infection. Studies in Iran show that students and teachers have not adequate knowledge of HIV/AIDS. The aim of this study is to assess the effect of participatory education on attitudes of personnel of schools toward HIV/AIDS. One hundred and fourteen school personnel were selected randomly to participate in an interventional study. The participants took part in a three-day workshop on HIV/AIDS prevention program in schools. The workshop content included the principles of HIV/AIDS and procedures for its control and prevention; the methods used were group discussion and group work for presentation of a HIV/AIDS prevention programme at schools through a logical framework method. A questionnaire was given to the participants to evaluate their knowledge of and attitude toward HIV/AIDS before and after the interventions. The mean age of participants was 40.87 (SD = 6.58). There was no significant relationship between gender/official post/length of service and attitude before or after the workshop. There was a significant change in personnel's attitude to HIV/AIDS after the workshop. There was a significant correlation between the increase of personnel's knowledge of and attitude to HIV/AIDS after the workshop introducing methods such as participatory education and asking participants to suggest a program for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in their fields are useful for increasing knowledge and changing their attitude toward HIV/AIDS.

**Key words:** HIV/AIDS, participatory education, knowledge, school personnel

### INTRODUCTION

Concerns that HIV would continue to strengthen its presence in the Middle East and North Africa are borne out by the latest estimates which show the 92000 people became infected with HIV in 2004. At the present time, there is significant scope for further expansion of AIDS epidemics in the countries of this region (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004).

It is obvious that prevention of new cases of HIV infection in the youth and adolescents is crucial in the control of this epidemic, hence we target for school personnel as important health message disseminators.

School personnel's knowledge and attitude towards HIV/AIDS have a great role in students' knowledge of and attitude to this infection. Furthermore, teachers affect the students' behaviours while they are encountering this disaster (Agrawal *et al.*, 1999; Glenister *et al.*, 1990; Chu *et al.*, 1995; Ndegwa *et al.*, 2002).

Many studies in Iran show that students and teachers have not adequate knowledge of HIV/AIDS and sometimes they have incorrect information about the

nature of this infection and its related issues. Also, their attitude to this infection is not suitable; therefore their behaviour seems to be risky and threatening for the society (Memor, 2001; Karimi *et al.*, 2000; Farouzi *et al.*, 2001).

Peltzer (2000) says that there is very poor general knowledge about transmission of HIV/AIDS and moderately high supportive attitudes about dealing with this infection in schoolteachers of South Africa. Besides that, many other studies show different attitudes in schoolteachers of different countries that are sometimes inappropriate (Dawsom *et al.*, 2001; Brook *et al.*, 1999; Munodawata, 1991).

In the national strategic programme of HIV/AIDS in Iran, some strategies have been proposed with respect to implementation of HIV/AIDS information in schoolbooks and the organizing HIV/AIDS educational and consultation centres at schools (Saeidi *et al.*, 2001). Because of insufficient knowledge of and unsuitable attitude to HIV/AIDS in school teachers and students in Iran, various programmes and policies, in addition to the above mentioned strategies, seem to be necessary on

schools. In this research, we aimed to assess the effect of participatory education on attitudes of personnel of Tabriz schools towards HIV/AIDS through a community trial study.

Tabriz is a city in the Eastern Azerbaijan province which is located in the North West of Iran.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Participants:** According to an agreement with department of education in Tabriz, 114 school personnel were selected randomly to participate in this study. The schools included: Elementary schools (Grades 1-5), guidance schools (Grades 6-8) and high schools (Grades 9-11) and pre- universities. The participants were invited to take part in a three-day workshop on HIV/AIDS prevention program in schools.

**Procedure:** The workshop content included the principles of HIV/AIDS and procedures for its control and prevention; the methods used were group discussion and group work for presentation of a HIV/AIDS prevention programme at schools through a logical framework method. Prior to the commencement of the workshop a questionnaire was carried out to the participants to evaluate their knowledge of and attitude toward HIV/AIDS (pre-test). After the workshop, the same questionnaire was administered to participants in order to investigate the effect of participatory education on their attitude to HIV/AIDS (post-test).

**Questionnaires:** The questionnaires assessed 'positive and negative attitudes' in the following areas:

- Effect of religious beliefs in AIDS prevention
- Appropriate stage for beginning of HIV/AIDS education at schools
- Keeping away infected individuals from their jobs
- Shopping for food products in markets whose shopkeepers are infected
- Informing a student's parents if he/she talks about his/her sexual experiences
- Keeping away infected students from his/her school
- Keeping away infected teachers from the schools
- Education on sex and HIV/AIDS prevention in extracurricular programmes and group discussions
- Education on HIV/AIDS prevention for students parents
- Using peer education for HIV/AIDS prevention at schools

## Demographic variables and statistical analyses

**Demographic variables for participants include:** Age, gender, length of service and official title or post were assessed via questionnaires. Participants were divided into five groups according to their official post: headmasters, assistants, teachers, consultants and health instructors. Educational intervention (workshop) was independent variable, while the personnel's attitude to HIV/AIDS was our dependent variable during the study. Data extracted from the questionnaires were analysed by the statistical software "SPSS".

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Participants and demographic variables:** The mean age of participants was 40.87 (SD = 6.58). The male/female distribution was 68.5% females and 31.5% males. Of the total 144 participants, 31.2% were headmasters, 17.4% were assistants, 17.4% were teachers, 11.9% were consultants and 22% were health instructors. The mean length of service of all participants was 18.2 years (SD = 7.3).

Statistical analysis shows that there is no significant relationship between gender/official post/record of service and attitude before or after the workshop (gender and attitude;  $p = 0.4$ , official post and attitude;  $p = 0.08$ , record of service and attitude;  $p = 0.8$ ).

**Questionnaires:** Statistical analyses show that there is a significant change in personnel's attitude to HIV/AIDS after the workshop. Score of attitude in pre-test was 29.8% (SD = 4.4), while it was 33.0% (SD = 3.6) in post-test. There was a significant correlation between the increase of personnel's knowledge of and attitude to HIV/AIDS after the workshop ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $r = 0.27$ ). Figure 1 illustrates the correlation between the increase of knowledge and attitude of personnel after the intervention. It would be better to add at this point that increase of the knowledge of the sample was also significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Of the all participants, 90% believed that religious beliefs have an effective role in HIV/AIDS prevention in adolescents. After the workshop, most of the participants (91.9%) believed that it is necessary to begin HIV/AIDS educational programmes from elementary or at least guidance school. Table 1 shows the participants' attitude to the appropriate stage of primary HIV/AIDS education at schools both before and after the workshop.

The participants' attitude to keeping away infected individuals from their job, or keeping away infected students and teachers from their school decreased after the workshop. Table 2 demonstrates these decreases according to the data extracted from the pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

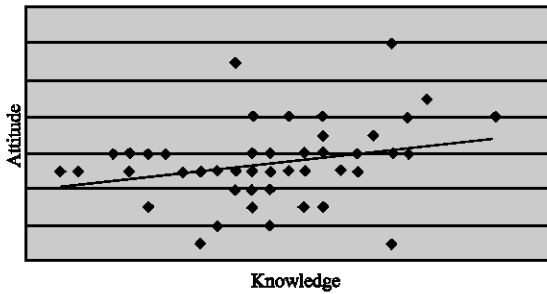


Fig. 1: The correlation between the personnel's knowledge of and attitude to HIV/AIDS

Table 1: Participants' attitude to the appropriate stage of primary HIV/AIDS education at schools both before and after the workshop (the numbers indicate the per cent of agreement in the sample)

Stage	Elementary school	Guidance school	High school	Not at school
Pre-test	18.6	54.9	25.7	0.9
Post-test	40.5	51.4	8.1	0

Table 2: Participants' attitude to keeping away infected people (per cents show agreement to keeping away)

Different groups	Keeping away from job (all)	Keeping teachers away from job	Keeping students away from job
Pre-test	21.5%	34.8%	27.7%
Post-test	4.5%	14.4%	12.6%

There was no significant change in the participants' attitude to educating students in sexual concerns and also educating both students and their parents on HIV/AIDS prevention.

Personnel's attitude of refusing to go shopping at markets of food products, which their shopkeepers are infected, decreased 45.4% after the workshop.

There was also a decrease of 20.2% in sample's attitude that a student's parents should be informed if he/she talks about his/her sexual experiences.

There was an increase of 17% in personnel's attitude to using peer education for HIV/AIDS preventions at schools.

As mentioned above, there is not any significant relationship between official post and appropriate attitude to HIV/AIDS. It shows that there is not any different attitude between health instructors and other personnel before the educational intervention. It controverts the similar study of Dawson *et al.* (2001) in the United States.

Being unsuccessful in finding a significant relationship between the personnel's attitude and their record of service shows that, there have not been any appropriate attitudes to HIV/AIDS during last decades. This interpretation is in agreement with the national studies (Memor, 2001; Karimi *et al.*, 2000; Forouzi *et al.*, 2001).

Improvement on the attitude of personnel towards HIV/AIDS after the workshop clarifies the effectiveness of

HIV/AIDS educational programmes and policies in schools esp. participatory education and involving school personnel in HIV/AIDS prevention planning process in schools. It is obtained from the results that educational programme such as participatory education affects school personnel's knowledge of and attitude to HIV/AIDS positively and in favour of HIV/AIDS prevention. It is obvious that such improvements would have a positive effect on students' knowledge, attitude and behaviours towards this infection.

Study of Peltzer (2000) in South Africa is in agreement with the poor correlation between increases of sample's knowledge and attitude during the study. Although the correlation of increases is significant, the correlation coefficient (0.27) shows that knowledge does not always lead to appropriate or positive attitude. Study of Glenister *et al.* (1990) shows the similar pattern in both students and teachers.

It would be better to mention that it is necessary to implement HIV/AIDS education in the school programs and also extracurricular schedule before high school esp. in elementary schools. It is clear that improvement on school personnel's knowledge and attitude towards HIV/AIDS strengthens this idea.

According to results, participants' attitude to keeping away infected people either from their jobs or from schools has decreased after the intervention. It shows that we can effectively decrease and maybe eradicate this thought via various educational programmes such as participatory education. Furthermore, peer education seems to be effective among students.

It would be suggested, that according to the insufficient knowledge of and unsuitable attitude to HIV/AIDS in Iranian schools (Memor, 2001; Karimi *et al.*, 2000; Forouzi *et al.*, 2001) it is very necessary to implement various educational programmes of HIV/AIDS prevention and control. As this research showed, these programmes can play an important role in the future of HIV/AIDS prevention in Iranian schools. Furthermore, introducing methods such as log-frame for HIV/AIDS control in schools to school staff and also involving them in planning process is useful for increasing knowledge and changing their attitude toward HIV/AIDS.

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