

Empowering Lives of Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) in India - The Role of NGOs in

Promoting Safe Sex Practices

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Abstract

In the complex tapestry of India's social landscape, commercial sex work remains a controversial and stigmatized profession. Amidst the challenges faced by commercial sex workers, including societal discrimination and health risks, there is a glimmer of hope in the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working tirelessly to promote safe sex practices. This article sheds light on the vital role played by NGOs in empowering commercial sex workers to adopt safer lifestyles, thereby protecting their health and well-being.

Introduction:

The world is a witness to the hydra-headed monster called HIV-AIDS which has assumed monstrous proportions in recent times the world over. The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). AIDS has a negative impact on infant, child and maternal mortality, life expectancy and growth (Patil, 2003). Panzarine, S. and Santelli, J. (1987):. AIDS is a chronic, debilitating disease that brings in its wake unforeseen misery, pain, anguish, emotional and physical turbulence in the lives of patients suffering from HIV-AIDS.. Multiple episodes of acute serious illness, dependency and deaths are quite common occurrence. These sexually active commercial Sex workers (CSWs), both male and female, are at a grave risk as the sexual route is the predominant mode of transmission of HIV naturally

Objectives of the study

- 1 To study the extent of prevalence of HIV/AIDS in India
2. To study the role of NGOS in controlling HIV/AIDS.

Methodology Used

1. Secondary data have been used to substantiate the facts

Commercial Sex Work in India:

From sociological and historical perspectives, commercial sex work has deep roots in Indian society. In twenty first century, there is a sizeable proportion of Commercial Sex Workers who are engaged in the profession due to a string of pressing social and economic constraints like lack of education, or social marginalization, poverty, ignorance and pressure.. Unfortunately, these circumstances expose sex workers to numerous health risks, including the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the threat of HIV/AIDS. In India, with a large population and population density, low levels of literacy and awareness, HIV/AIDS has come to be the most challenging health problem ever faced by the country.

As per (NACO, 2006) Report 1.2 million deaths occur per year in the 15-45 age group of which , an estimated of 10 to 40 percent are believed to be HIV related. According to the new estimation, HIV prevalence rate among the general population is 0.36 per cent for the nation as a whole (NACO 2006). In terms of absolute number it works out to 2.5 million persons are living with HIV in India. As per (NACO& ICMR, 2021) Fact Sheet Report At the national level, estimated adult HIV prevalence (15-49 years) has declined since the epidemic's peak in 2000 where prevalence was estimated at 0.55% in 2000, through to 0.32% in 2010, and 0.21% in 2021.

The northeast region States have the highest adult HIV prevalence (2.70% in Mizoram, 1.36% in Nagaland and 1.05% in Manipur), followed by southern States (0.67% in Andhra Pradesh, 0.47% in Telangana and 0.46% in Karnataka).

The number of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) are estimated at around 24 lakhs. Southern States have the largest number of PLHIV viz. Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka being the top three. Annual New Infection (ANI) are estimated at 62.97 thousand in 2021 in India. There is an estimated 46.3% decline in ANI at national level from 2010-2021.

A declining trend is noted in most States. Top 3 States with most rapid decline are Himachal Pradesh (with around 73% decline from 2010-2021), Tamil Nadu (around 72% decline), Telangana (nearly 71% decline). An increasing trend is estimated in the northeast States of Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Sikkim, Mizoram, and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. AIDS Related Deaths (ARD) are estimated at 41.97 thousand in 2021 in India.

A decline of 76.5% in ARD has been estimated at national level from 2010-21. The declining trend is noted in all States/UTs excluding Puducherry, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Tripura. The highest decline in ARD is estimated in Chandigarh, Telangana, and West Bengal.

PMTCT need are estimated at 20,612 in 2021 in India. Top 3 states accounting for the highest need are Maharashtra (12.9%), Bihar (11.9%) and Uttar Pradesh (10.6%). Latest 2021 HIV estimates provide critical evidence to help inform further geographic and population prioritization of HIV prevention, testing and treatment efforts. (NACO & ICMR 2023)

Role of NGOs in Promoting Safe Sex Practices:

Education and Awareness:

NGOs play a pivotal role in not only educating sex workers about the importance of safe sex practices but also general public regarding HIV AIDS and its debilitating effects. Through workshops, seminars, and community outreach programs, these organizations provide crucial information about the transmission of STIs, preventive measures, and the proper use of contraceptives. This knowledge empowers sex workers to make informed decisions about their health.

Distribution of Contraceptives:

NGOs actively engage in the distribution of condoms and other contraceptives, ensuring that sex workers have easy access to these essential resources. By making these items readily available, NGOs contribute to the prevention of STIs and unintended pregnancies, fostering a safer working environment for sex workers. NACO launched a massive project on distribution of contraceptives among Commercial Sex Workers and their potential clients like Truck Drivers, auto drivers and the like.

Regular Health Check-ups:

Many NGOs operate health clinics or collaborate with existing healthcare facilities to provide regular health check-ups for sex workers. These check-ups include screenings for STIs and HIV/AIDS, allowing for early detection and timely intervention. This proactive approach significantly improves the overall health of sex workers.

Rehabilitation and Empowerment through Vocational Training:

Some NGOs go beyond health initiatives and offer vocational training programs, empowering sex workers with alternative income-generating skills. By providing opportunities for financial

independence, these programs aim to reduce reliance on sex work and, consequently, lower exposure to associated health risks.

Advocacy for Legal Rights:

NGOs actively advocate for the legal rights of sex workers, seeking to destigmatize their profession and eliminate discriminatory practices. By challenging societal norms and pushing for policy changes, these organizations contribute to creating an environment where sex workers can access healthcare without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Conclusion:

The incidence of HIV -AIDS among commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) is still alarming in India. The devastating and horrendous effects of HIV/AIDS has serious and multipronged, deleterious psychological, social, and economic implications.

The tireless efforts of NGOs including NACO (National AIDS Control Organization) in India have been instrumental in transforming the lives of commercial sex workers by promoting safe sex practices and advocating for their rights and bringing down the number of HIV /AIDS patients.. Through education, healthcare, and empowerment initiatives, these organizations are breaking down barriers and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.

It is imperative and crucial to recognize the valuable contribution of NGOs .It is high time conscious members of the society, health managers, policy makers, academicians and public take serious note of HIV AIDS as a growing social problem and make well directed, organized, collective ,cohesive and concerted efforts .There is a pressing need to join hands and continue supporting efforts of NGOs to create a safer and healthier future for India's sex workers in particular and people at large..

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