

Involvement of HIV positive persons in AIDS prevention activities

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The magnitude of HIV and AIDS epidemic in the global scenario is still high. A total of 39.5 million people are estimated by World Health Organization and UNAIDS to be living with HIV in 2006. During the last one year about 2.9 million people have lost their life due to AIDS.¹

The National Center for AIDS Control of Nepal estimates the number of people living with HIV/AIDS at 70,259. However, only 8244 have been reported till the end of November 2006 since the detection of HIV in the country in 1988². Of the total reported number, an overwhelming majority (3989) are clients of sex workers and a significant number (1531) are housewives, indicating towards shifting of the infection from most at risk population to general population.

Last 18 years of AIDS prevention have seen various strategies, plans and activities in Nepal. However, stigma, discrimination and poor attention to care and support are still the much talked issues. The key factors behind this are quoted as non-seeking of testing, low level of awareness about HIV/AIDS, lack of Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) services and negative attitude of service providers. Recent Demographic and Health Survey has shown that the “awareness” among men has gone to a level of 91.7% compared to 72.6% in women, however the level varies with age group and literacy level.³

The scenario regarding the response to HIV/AIDS by the HIV infected people has been gradually changing now. Many HIV positive groups have been formed and are active in the AIDS prevention activities. NAP+N, an NGO of HIV positive people mentions that under its network some 17 groups are actively

working in AIDS prevention activities in various parts of Nepal. They are also active in reducing stigma and discrimination, promoting prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT), advocacy for wide availability of anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs and promotion of VCT along with other AIDS prevention activities in most at risk population.

The 19th world AIDS Day (WAD) which was observed on 1st December 2006 has stressed on the supportive activities for HIV positive people through its theme “Keep the promises”. It also indicates towards wider access and provision of variety of services- including VCT, PMTCT, ARV, care and support.

Some of the AIDS activists are actively participating in advocacy, training and media giving positive message to the people, where as others are active in international and national AIDS prevention as well as in care and support activities. It is hoped to create an enabling environment for people living with HIV.

Programmatically, close collaboration with civil society organizations and service providers is expected to reduce stigma and discrimination and help in providing support services including care and support.

Reference

1. WHO and UNAIDS, 2006. Global Summary of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.
2. NCASC, Cumulative HIV and AIDS Situation of Nepal, October 31, 2006.
3. GON-MOHP, New ERA and ORC Macro. Nepal demographic and Health Survey 2006, Preliminary Report