

The Roadmap to Increased Self Determination

The Issue:

Adolescents have only recently been recognized as a separate group with different needs than adults or other children. In India, as elsewhere, however, the health and other needs of adolescent girls, particularly those who are unmarried, are not adequately addressed. Responding to requests from adolescents to address such needs, and observing the situation of unmarried youth in their program area, Swaasthya conducted sexual behaviour research among unmarried adolescents in Tigri, Delhi, between July 1996 and December 1997. In response to the findings, an intervention study was undertaken, to develop, implement, and evaluate a community-based programme to improve adolescents' life skills and sexual health.

The Study (April 1998 – September 2001):

Primary objective: to enhance the sexual health of adolescent girls by addressing them and their "immediate" environment through a participatory, community development approach.

Study site: Tigri resettlement colony, Delhi, India

Intervention elements:

- *Skills Building Modules(SBM)* – set of 7 training modules to build girls' understanding of 'self', and increase their capacities and life skills to deal with real life situations, both social and health-related.
- *Communication Package* - disseminating information by interpersonal communication with trained Swaasthya field workers (*didi*), and through indigenously made videos aired on local television.
- *Social Support* – creating a support network for the girls by forming women's and adolescent community groups that met monthly to increase understanding between mothers & daughters.

Main outcome of interest: Increase in perceived self-determination regarding ability to decide whether and when to marry, and when to have a first child.

Intermediate outcomes of interest: increase in: perceived support from gatekeepers such as parents; knowledge of reproductive & sexual health; knowledge of legal issues; positive perspective on sex and violence.

Evaluation Methodology and Findings:

Qualitative evaluation data included focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with participants. For the quantitative evaluation, two cross-sectional surveys of unmarried girls age 12-22 years were undertaken, at the beginning of the intervention (S1) and 18 months later (S2). For each, a different sample but of the same size (401) was drawn using simple random sampling technique. In both S1 and S2, data was collected on social and demographic variables, and on all outcomes of interest. In the second survey, questions on the extent of exposure to the Swaasthya interventions was also included. Bivariate and multivariate analysis assessed the effect of Swaasthya interventions on outcomes.

Effect of intermediate outcomes on final outcome: quantitative analysis showed that the knowledge of reproductive and sexual health, and knowledge of legal issues, were particularly effective in increasing perceived self-determination. These intermediate

outcomes, in turn, were key aspects of Swaasthya's intervention.

Variable	S1(%)	S2(%)
Perceive high support from gatekeepers	12	68
High RSH knowledge	44	48
High legal knowledge	21	58
High positive perspective score	32	46
High perceived self determination	36	47

Outcomes:

Swaasthya's intervention elements are effective tools for adolescent development:

- *SBM*: quantitative and qualitative data showed that these modules increased girls' perceived self-determination, knowledge of reproductive and sexual health, and positive perspectives.

"When I developed a friendship with one boy...my brother saw us and informed my father...my father started hitting me. Then I talked confidently to my father...the way I answered my father was possible only due to SBM training...I even told my father... your daughter also has some wishes like the choice of partner...yet my father is not ready...but I believe that he will agree." Unmarried adolescent girl, SBM participant

- *Communication package*: qualitative and quantitative data suggest that the Swaasthya field workers were effective in increasing girls' knowledge of RSH, and their perceptions of support from gatekeepers. The video intervention was delayed and thus unable to be effectively evaluated.
- *Social support*: qualitative evidence points strongly to the effectiveness of this strategy in improving communication between girls and their mothers, and in changing adult gatekeepers' perceptions of adolescent girls' lives and needs.

Next Steps:

- Sustainability: Swaasthya will undertake a study to ascertain the sustainability of the intervention in Tigri in the long run, with respect to the community's ability to implement it on their own after Swaasthya has phased out its activities.
- Replication: Swaasthya is in the process of replicating the intervention research study through a partner organisation, the National Institute of Urban Affairs, that works in a similar socio-cultural environment as where the study was developed. The replication is taking place in Naglamachi slum (*basti*), Delhi.

The project:

Since 1999, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is collaborating with partners in India on multi-site intervention studies on adolescent reproductive health in India. The partners are Christian Medical College, the Institute for Health Management, Swaasthya, KEM Hospital Research Centre, and the Foundation for Research in Health Systems. The studies are supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

The intervention study by Swaasthya (1998-2001) described here focused on increasing life skills and confidence of young, unmarried girls, to improve their sexual health, and their ability to negotiate their environment. The MacArthur and Ford Foundations funded the intervention implementation. This study was the second phase of a larger three-part study on adolescent health and development. The first phase, from 1996-97, comprised qualitative, community-based research to determine unmarried adolescents' needs, constraints, and queries. Based on the results, the study described here was conducted. The third phase, recently started, is the replication of Swaasthya's successful adolescent development model to another urban site in Delhi. The final aim of such replication, being conducted in partnership with a quasi-governmental organization, the National Institute of Urban Affairs, is to test the feasibility of replicating an innovative model by transferring it to, and training staff from, a quasi-government agency, and then to scale it up to multiple sites in Delhi and elsewhere in the country.

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