

# A COMPREHENSIVE HIV RISK REDUCTION INTERVENTION AMONG THE STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN OF NIZAMUDDIN IN NEW DELHI, INDIA

NALINI SAHAY,<sup>1</sup> MARIA EKSTRAND, PHD,<sup>2</sup> DEBORAH BAIN, MPH,<sup>2</sup> JEFFREY MANDEL, PHD, MPH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PROJECT FLOWER, NEW DELHI, INDIA

<sup>2</sup>CENTER FOR AIDS PREVENTION STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO, USA

## ABSTRACT

**Issues:** Street children in New Delhi have to struggle both to earn money for food, to find shelter, and to remain safe from harm and exploitation. Many report having “survival sex” that places them at risk for acquiring HIV and other STDs. We have developed a comprehensive risk reduction intervention targeting HIV-related drug and sexual behaviors, identifying perceived stressors, increasing coping skills, and providing job training and placements.

**Description:** Project “Flower” operates in the Nizamuddin slums of New Delhi, employing social workers as HIV educators. Two hundred boys and girls are a part of this intervention program. The majority are school drop outs, and most are supporting themselves as day laborers. They report multiple fears related to living on the streets, and virtually all of them are afraid of sexual abuse and police harassment. They are also concerned about their lack of education and worried about their future ability to survive economically and socially. Drug use is common, particularly cannabis smoking; several children report having sex under the influence of stimulants.

Almost all of these street children are ignorant about AIDS. Few youth believe AIDS is a problem, or knew how to use a condom prior to the intervention. In response to these needs, Project Flower provides training in HIV/AIDS information, as well as literacy education, coping skills, and condom use skills. We provide health checkups and vocational skills such as motorcycle mechanics, bag making and henna body painting.

Process data show that this program has become very popular with the local street and working children. The project staff has also managed to involve the local community to provide space, food and support for some of its vocational programs. All intervention participants have demonstrated proper condom use to the staff educators and many of the boys continue to come by the project site to obtain condoms.

**Conclusions:** Street children in the slums of New Delhi do not consider HIV/AIDS to be a problem, yet their behavior puts them at high risk for infection. A comprehensive HIV risk reduction intervention program that provides basic health education and vocational training has been well received by these children and appears to have encouraged condom use and readiness for job placement.

PROJECT FLOWER  is in its third year

## BACKGROUND

Nizamuddin, a slum area in New Delhi, has a floating population of runaway adolescent boys and girls who:

- Are predominantly from minority communities,
- Are mostly school drop-outs and/or barely literate,
- Have a high incidence of drug abuse (cannabis and alcohol),
- Have a low knowledge about HIV/AIDS, and
- Report multiple fears, including sexual abuse, police harassment, and survival concerns.

## METHODS

- We developed and implemented an educational intervention that included HIV/AIDS information and condom use skills provided by social workers.
- We also provided literacy education, coping skills, health checkups, medicine, and vocational skills.
- We built trust by providing breakfast, playing games, and providing identity cards to avoid police harassment.

## RESULTS

### Impact evaluation

#### Before the intervention

- Almost all boys and girls visiting Project Flower did not know how to use a condom, did not consider AIDS to be a problem, and feared sexual abuse.
- A third reported smoking cannabis.
- A few reported anal sex under the influence of alcohol.
- Most sought seclusion when sad.

#### After 9 months of interaction with Project Flower

- Improved knowledge about HIV/AIDS.
- Most knew how to use a condom and could demonstrate proper use.
- Most reported sporadic condom use during sexual encounters, and a few reported using a condom every time.
- Many had taken condoms regularly from the health educators, and a few reported purchasing condoms.


### Process evaluation

- We interact with an average of 20 boys per day. From these interactions, approximately 3 boys are attending our sessions.
- Some come back regularly for breakfast and condoms.
- We have a site office where the boys play chess and other games.
- We interact with an average of 10 girls per day. From these, typically 2-3 take away information about HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

PHOTOS OF PROJECT FLOWER 

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- A comprehensive HIV risk reduction intervention program is effective in increasing knowledge of HIV/AIDS and condom use among street and working children in an urban Indian slum.
- HIV/AIDS information and condom use skills must be linked to services providing basic education, health, and vocational training in order to be effective.
- Continuity and trust are critical to having an impact on the community of street and working children.

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