

TAI - VHS - Avahan

Crisis Response System -

A 'three pronged' approach of TAI



GOOD PRACTICE DOCUMENTATION



GOOD PRACTICE DOCUMENTATION

Tamil Nadu AIDS Initiative (TAI)
Voluntary Health Services (VHS)
T.T.T.I. Post, Adyar, Chennai - 600 113. Tamil Nadu, India.

Sex work in Tamil Nadu operates in a clandestine manner due to the social stigma, an ambiguous legal status and moral stand attached to the profession by the society. Sex workers are driven to sex work due to various reasons such as poverty, illiteracy, marital conflicts and lack of family support. Men and women in sex work suffer from stigma and discrimination making them easy targets of violence. Dependency on sex work due to low socio economic status makes them vulnerable to violence leaving them incapable of negotiating safe sex. Various perpetrators such as rowdies, abusive clients and partners, coercive husbands, law enforcing authorities and society including neighbors subject them to violence. Fear of violence prevents them from seeking health services, negotiating safe sex; which in turn makes them helpless and susceptible to the risk of STI/HIV.

NEED FOR VIOLENCE REDRESSAL SYSTEM

When Tamil Nadu AIDS Initiative (TAI) started implementing HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention program among the Most at Risk Population (MARP) it was understood that violence was reported as one of the major obstacles for accessing HIV intervention services. Sex workers are under the constant threat of violence and suffer from low self-esteem, emotional stress and depression; consequently the prevention of HIV or other

health needs becomes secondary. Realizing the need for strategies to prevent violence, TAI initiated series of community consultations which revealed the need for a systematic response, which would be quick, available round the clock and sustainable. After such consultations TAI developed a system of responding to crisis, called ‘24 Hours Rapid Response System’ with a special task force handling different types of violence. The Rapid Response System was a three pronged approach to get the maximum impact for the violence redressal. In order to make it effective and sustainable, TAI promoted a sense of ownership among the community towards the Crisis Management System by enabling them to address violence themselves. Initially, most sex workers felt violence was a part of their lives and never realized it could be addressed. TAI felt that it was essential to educate the sex workers using community friendly Inter Personal Communication (IPC) materials to make them aware of the exploitation they were subjected to and to raise their voice against violence. TAI incorporated the component of advocacy in its three pronged approach; the advocacy efforts with the law enforcing agencies and the judiciary aimed at further strengthening the crisis response efforts.



Types of violence faced by the sex workers

“Unwanted Advances”

Malathi was a beautiful FSW who tried avoiding the village headman due to fear of facing coerced sex. When she decided to leave the village, someone entered her house and sprayed acid on her face. Due to this violence, she lost her eye sight and underwent suffering. She continues to be in sex work but wants justice for her lost eye sight.

“Social Intimidation”

Ramya a transgender community prior to her castration often had to hear from the family and society that she is not a woman but a man. She was subjected to ragging at the school and by general public regarding her feminine behavior. She felt compelled to undergo the castration only to prove to the society and family that she is a woman. Despite the status of being a transgender, post castration, she often has to hear words such as....“No matter what you do, you cannot become a woman and will continue to be a man”. Ramya says, “When I hear such words, I get intimidated and endure severe mental stress.

“Sex for Safety”

Single and destitute women are not given houses on rent due to social stigma attached to the single status. Some men knowing that the woman is a sex worker try to take advantage by offering support to find a house to take on rent. Later these men become live-in-partners exploiting the women by connecting them with the clients for a commission and also enjoying free sex, food and a comfortable stay that they get by living with these women.

TYPES OF VIOLENCE

Sex workers face different types of violence which can be categorized as physical, sexual, psychological, economic and societal violence. The violent act at times, throws them out of their shelter, injuring them and causing emotional distress. For instance, a sex worker may suffer from physical violence due to alcoholic husbands/partners. The abusive partner forces her to part with all the money earned through sex work or spend it on his needs. The sexual violence is caused by pimp/lodge owner who leverages the situation by providing space and clients to the sex workers. Similarly, a sex worker in the clutches of an exploitative partner can suffer serious psychological problems apart from physical violence; she in turn would put up with all these atrocities for the sake of having a male partner to live within the society. Economic violence/extortions are most likely to come from the uniformed personnel who demand money for letting the sex worker free of legal procedures. If the sex worker resists she may be arrested which could result in violence under custody.

The societal violence can come in the form of expelling the sex worker from his/her residence, neighborhood, family and society at large after being labeled as sex worker.

HANDLING VIOLENCE THROUGH A ‘three pronged’ APPROACH

TAI developed a strategy that had three components; community ownership, awareness through IPC and advocacy with key players. These three strategies were needed for redressal of crisis to make the crisis management successful.

1. COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP IN THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The community mobilization efforts of TAI began with the formation of various community collectives such as Peer Educator's Collective, Community Committee members collective and Self Help Group collective. The community felt that violence redressal system could be handled by the CBOs as these organizations possessed strength and solidarity. They would take up the responsibility of protecting the rights of sex workers. One of the main objectives of the CBOs is the crisis management system to help victims of violence.

Initially a task force was formed to handle violence cases and provide solutions. The task force consisted of community members from different cadre such as Peer Educator, Sundaramukhis (groups consisting of 20 members enrolled with CBOs), Community link leaders and crisis response committee. The efforts were facilitated by Project Manager, Counselor and Outreach worker. Additional support, guidance and assistance came from the sensitized Police personnel and lawyers. The incidence of violence was first communicated to the peer educator, an active member in the redressal system.

The information was conveyed to the task force for convening a quick meeting to plan the immediate action and respond to the violence reported.

"Violence can be addressed"

"I avoided going to CBO office due to the fear of getting noticed by the society I live in. I knew how violence was being addressed, however, I kept away from it. Only when I faced violence due to anti-social elements I was forced to complain to the CBO office. I was surprised at the systematic manner in which the complaint was registered and solved. I realize the power of unity and strength and to be a part of an organization. Now I help my CBO in assisting them in solving cases of violence" says Radha

As the CBO became more active and experienced with handling violence, the system underwent further changes. To ensure better reach of the services on crisis response, the first layer called the 'Primary Group' was formed at the village level with 12 – 15 community members living within a radius of 2 km. Every group had a leader who facilitated the response to the violence on community members. The leader has good rapport with the local police which helps in handling cases expeditiously. Such a system ensured timely reporting and handling emergency cases promptly. The next layer was the 'Block level forum' which had leaders from the various primary groups who handle cases of higher magnitude. The CBO Board usually handles cases of severe nature which require advocacy at the district level. Different layers of response system were created to build second line leaderships to ensure organizational (CBO) sustainability in

handling cases of violence. Depending on the nature and perpetrator of the violence the redressal system was planned and carried out. Violence resulting in grievous injury was reported to the police authorities and lawyers were engaged to provide necessary legal support. The time taken to reach the scene of violence was from 30 minutes to 1 hour. Most of the cases were resolved within 24 hours, however few required more time to get completely resolved.

2. IPC MATERIAL FOR ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

TAI produced interpersonal communication material to provide awareness and information to the sex workers on how to handle violence. This included providing basic information which they need to know in order to protect them during crisis.

- FSW/TGs cannot be arrested beyond 6 pm
- FSW/TGs cannot be detained in police custody without a female attendant/staff
- FSW/TGs should not be hand cuffed

However it was made clear to them that the assistance and support to them during crisis would be provided only if they were on the right side of law and did not indulge in any unlawful activity.

"No to slavery"

"My husband shouts at me every day. He complains about the food that I cook and finds fault with me for everything. He does not give me the TV remote and wants me to see only the channels that are his favorite. Also, he has sex with me whenever he wants not understanding my need and situation. After watching the videos (Mounam) and IPC material produced by TAI I realized that I was living a life of slavery and was being exploited. I decided to come out of bondage" - says Lakshmi

Three short films were prepared based on themes which depicted the types of violence reported. "PasaParavaigal" (Birds of Affection) and "Mounam" (Silence) focused on sensitizing the power structure about the sufferings of the sex worker and create a sense of empathy. "MuttruPulli" (Full Stop) described the different types of violence against sex workers and the options available to them to protect themselves. This film was shown at the Drop-in-centers to educate the sex workers on various methods to handle violence. TAI prepared a booklet called 'Kakka Kakka' which had the names and contact details of the lawyers who volunteered to assist them whenever they needed help. This booklet was made available to all the community members and was used widely in times of crisis. TAI Cultural Troupe of transgender community visited villages which reported stigma and discrimination against the sex worker and performed street plays to change the attitude of the general community.

Sudha before being supported by crisis response system

“How can I say no to sex when anti-social elements demand that from me” “I am a sex worker”, “I have to face and bear violence which is normal”

Sudha with the support of crisis response system

“My phone was snatched and broken by an anti-social element knowing that I am a sex worker. When I tried resisting I was physically assaulted. I was shocked to see the insensitive behavior of the police when I reported the incident. After the crisis response has started, I know that I can take following steps to handle the violence. Report to the police station

1. Visit the government hospital and get treatment for injuries sustained. Get a medical certificate from the government doctor.
2. Register an FIR with the police station and collect the copy. Submit the medical certificate.
3. Submit the relevant documents for ownership of phone
4. If the local police refuse to book a case, I can seek the task force for higher referrals

3. ADVOCACY EFFORTS IN TACKLING VIOLENCE

The task force members were trained on advocacy with the police and lawyers to address various types of violence. This included lodging a complaint, approaching higher authorities and submitting petition to government officials whenever needed. In addition, they were also trained to represent problems and issues to other civil bodies for redressal. The trainings imparted and the experience gained gave them the confidence to work towards bringing about policy changes.

Sensitization programs for the police and media were organized periodically at the State/ District level by TANSACS and TAI to bring about an attitudinal change to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with the nature of work. Nearly 100 community members were trained on police advocacy and they sensitized various levels of police force on vulnerability of sex workers. Stake holder’s meetings were conducted by the NGOs/CBOs with police participation. Community member’s interactions with the police were encouraged to highlight the problems faced by the sex workers and seek support. During festivals, the community members visited the police stations, distributed sweets and tied friendship bands to acknowledge their services and support. This in turn helped the community build rapport with the law enforcing authorities.

TAI identified Lawyers, with a desire to serve the marginalized community in every district the program was operational, and formed them into a ‘Lawyer’s Forum’. The lawyers were trained and sensitized about the exploitation faced by sex workers. These lawyers in turn sensitized the sex workers on their rights and responsibilities and visited the police stations to defend their case, at times of arrests and detainments.

****Names of the Sex Workers in this document are changed to protect their privacy***

RESULTS

The graph (fig. 1) shows the total number of reported cases of violence to the crisis management system operated by the CBOs. A declining trend is seen in the cases of violence reported. This could be attributed to the efforts of Crisis Management System. In year 2007, 2008 and 2009, 97%, 98% and 96% of cases have been resolved respectively. However, in year 2010, 100% of cases reported have been resolved.

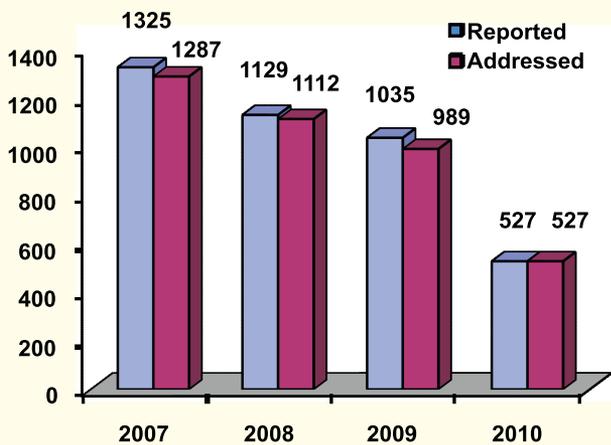


Fig. 1 : Trends of violence reported and resolved by the crisis management system in the 13 TAI intervention districts during 2007 - 2010. (Source: TAI CBO MIS data)

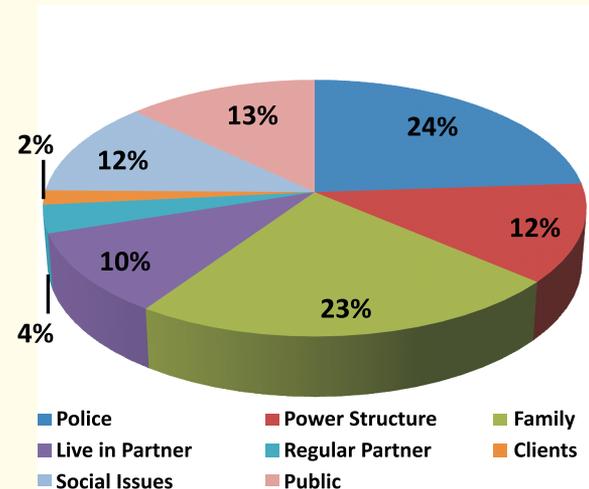


Fig.2: Trends of violence from various perpetrators reported and responded by the crisis management system in 13 TAI intervention districts during 2007 - 2010. (Source: TAI CBO MIS data)

The graph (fig 2) shows the total number of reported and resolved cases of violence from different perpetrators like police, power structure, family, regular partner and clients and public. The highest violence is from the police at 24% when compared to other types of violence.

DISCUSSION:

The systematic way in which TAI addressed violence, helped in the reduction of incidents of violence. The uptake of services such as visits to DIC, regular medical check-up and HIV testing improved dramatically. The timely redressal of violence empowered the community to report instances of violence which were not reported in the past due to fear. The power of collectivization gave them the courage to face violence and adversity with confidence and seek redressal. Hence, collectivization proved to be a means for an effective crisis redressal system to be in place.

With the help of IPC materials, the community was sensitized about types of violence and the associated behavior, which can attract further violence. Messages on dangers of soliciting clients in the late hours, going to unfamiliar areas with unknown customers, use of alcohol during encounter helped the community member to be cautious to avoid incidents of violence.

TAI's advocacy efforts with various levels of the police force helped in developing an empathy with sex worker community and reduced harassment. Simultaneously advocacy with the media was taken up to avoid unwanted publicity and exposure of the victims. The local power structures were exposed to TAI's IPC material to understand the hardships faced by the sex worker community and empathize with the community. Special efforts at rapport building with the power structures were undertaken such as tying a friendship band and distributing sweets during festivals and other occasions. This resulted in reducing harassment.

Violence has a direct bearing on lowering the self-esteem and confidence of the individuals affected. This in turn affects the safe sex practices including condom negotiation skills which make the individual susceptible to HIV infection. Hence, empowering the community to raise their voice against violence and seek redressal builds their confidence and helps them handle any situation where in safe sexual practices could be compromised.

The crisis response system which was centralized during the initial stage has now been decentralized to include task

force members of crisis response at the village and block levels to ensure reach from grass root level. A sustainable model has been created by differentiating violence by type and severity to be handled at different levels. The grass root level (primary level forum) task force members handled cases of domestic/ partner violence and property disputes. The block level forum handles violence from police and anti-social elements. The CBO Board handles reported cases of stigma and discrimination and they also worked towards sensitizing and drawing the attention of the government or local bodies in bringing about policy level changes for the benefit of the marginalized.

The success of the crisis response system of TAI in its intervention area is a model that can be replicated in other regions as well.

CONCLUSION:

The implementation of Crisis Response System through the three pronged approach of TAI resulted in decrease in number of cases of violence (1325 in 2007 to 527 in 2010). The number of cases of violence addressed within 24 hours increased during the same period. The community ownership in handling violence combined with education and awareness on legal rights and advocacy with key players made them confident and assertive in dealing with crisis situations. Addressing violence by the NGO/CBO increased the faith of the community and resulted in improved service uptake over the years. The empowered community steered Crisis Response System functions independently in addressing human rights violation and bringing justice to the marginalized.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	: Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
CBO	: Community Based Organisations
CCM	: Community Committee Member
DIC	: Drop in Center
FSW	: Female Sex Worker
HIV	: Human Immuno Deficiency Virus
IPC	: Interpersonal Communication
MARP	: Most at Risk Population
MIS	: Management Information System
NGO	: Non- Governmental Organisation
PE	: Peer Educator
STI	: Sexually Transmitted Infection
TAI	: Tamil Nadu AIDS Initiative
TANSACS	: Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society
TG	: Transgender
TI	: Targeted Intervention

Name of the Book : Good Practice Documentation: Crisis Response System -
A 'three pronged' approach of TAI

Documented by : Nafeesa John, Dr. Radha,
Simpson Cornelius, Dr. Joseph D. Williams

Published by : TAI-VHS

Year of Publication : 2013

Designed by : Sreshta communication

Printed by : Sreshta communication



Tamil Nadu AIDS Initiative (TAI) Voluntary Health Services

T.T.T.I. Post, Adyar, Chennai - 600 113. Tamil Nadu, India.

Ph: 044 - 2254 2353, 2354, 2355 | Fax: 044 - 2254 2302 | Website: www.taivhs.org