

Role of Posters in Enhancing HIV/AIDS Awareness

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Introduction

India has the third largest HIV epidemic in the world, with approximately 2.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS (that is 0.2% prevalence) and 0.1% incidence, over last year¹. The 90 - 90 - 90 target set by the United Nations has been envisioned by India, that by end of 2020, 90% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) will know their HIV status, 90% of people who know their HIV-positive status will be accessing treatment and 90% of people on treatment will have suppressed viral loads². Achieving this is still a challenge for India, inspite of the awareness, surveillance, free drug distribution by National AIDS Control Organisation of India. There is an urgent need for health education to reduce incidence of HIV/AIDS in the future. Posters are one of the important instruments for health education amongst general population. This review will examine the utility of posters for spreading awareness about the various issues related to HIV/AIDS and the quality of life of PLHIV based on the currently available literature.

Manna of posters

Poster presentation falls under the category of small media and is an effective mode of propaganda communication which involves both intellect and creativity. Posters provide an effective mode of delivering a message and are the commonest and most rapid way to disseminate information³. They are also the easiest and the most cost effective way to spread a word. A simple, small media poster has the power to become a multimedia trend if it strikes the right cord with a viewer, who then might share the poster as a photograph and forward it to his/her peers, and the chain would go on.

Qualities of a good poster

A poster is supposed to catch the attention, inform, convince and provoke. If the viewer feels addressed, a poster can influence his or her decisions through text and

images. An optimally designed poster appeals to the viewer's curiosity and intellect. A good quality poster must attract attention, be memorable and have an interesting design with a clearly structured message or statement. Posters are known to effectively stimulate the psychomotor skill of learning in a viewer. They act as a medium of communication which serves to elicit attention and focus on the centre of interest. They are effective if the images and slogans can be identified easily (Fig. 1). The appeal of the message allows the public to accept it on a widespread spectra of emotional, social, and intellectual levels. The poster should be in a language which is understood by the target group. It is not necessary to use texts, the language of illustrations is equally potent in delivering a desired message⁴.

Efficacy and shortcomings of posters

Posters in public spaces (pillars, parking lots, restrooms, hospital waiting areas, metro/bus stations, outside cinema multiplexes, etc.) are subject to numerous external influences such as the type of environment, lighting conditions, weather conditions, competition with other close by visual media, and partial concealment by persons or objects. The sum of these influences, and not always the optimal framework conditions, have a great impact on the visibility and readability of posters. All these factors, clubbed together, impact the efficacy of the poster.

A significant shortcoming in any poster can be inclusion of too much information (Fig. 2). Rege concluded in his study that for a poster to be good, the message should be so simple and short that the explaining and remembering become synonymous⁵.

HIV: The issue at hand

Inspite of low prevalence, India still has a large PLHIV population, and the matter of concern is new infections and HIV related deaths¹. The current incidence of HIV is much more potent than it's possible prevention. Therefore the posters can be utilised as a mass accessible media for spreading awareness among the general population. In a

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cross-sectional study it was reported that 67.9% of the subjects had received their very first piece of knowledge about HIV/AIDS via posters⁶.



Fig. 1:

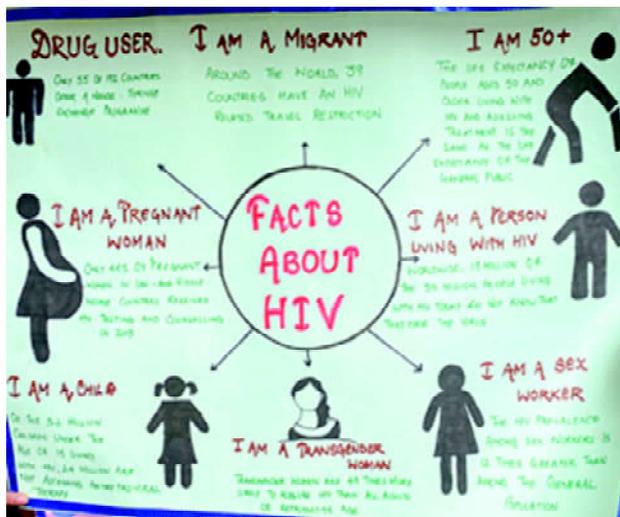


Fig. 2:

These posters can be intended for a specific target group, i.e., people who are already infected with HIV or for others at risk of acquiring new infection by way of high risk behaviour. It is essential to educate people about the modes of transmission of HIV and how it can be prevented by the use of preventive measures like using condoms and not sharing needles amongst Intravenous Drug Users (IDUs) (Fig. 3). Also, the people who might have already been infected with HIV and are unaware of their condition need to be made aware of the onset of symptoms (Fig. 4) once the infection has taken place so that they can identify these

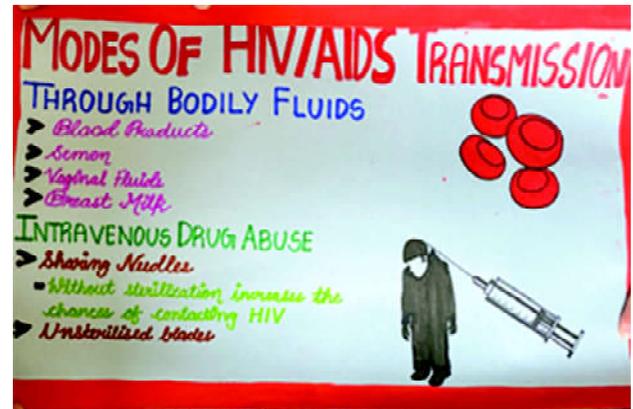


Fig. 3:

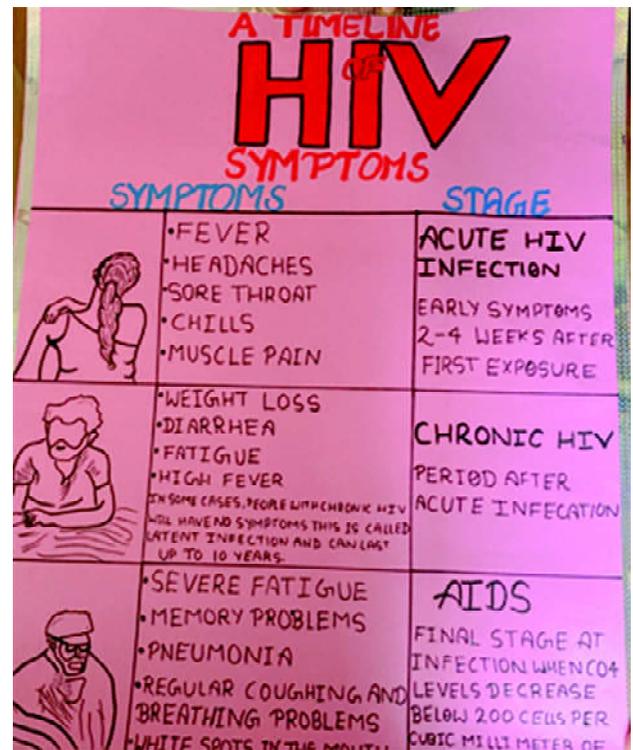


Fig. 4:

and then get themselves tested and become aware of their HIV status. In a study on pregnant mothers, it was found that 37% of the mothers received knowledge and awareness about possibility of mother-to-child transmission of HIV via posters and that prompted them to visit the antenatal clinic for their check-ups⁷.

Posters can also be helpful in combating the social stigma against HIV/AIDS and informing PLHIV about social and legal welfare schemes (Fig. 5). Today, with the wide spectrum of effective antiretroviral therapies (ART) available, posters can be utilised to inform the public about availability of these therapies and the treatment clinics (Fig. 6).

The right impact

Posters may not give in-depth information, but they can give a 'food for thought' and incite curiosity in the viewer to take out time and read about that one particular sentence, or even a word, which they saw on the poster. In their study, Lubinga *et al* reported that actual comprehension (AC) was initially low upon first encounter with a deliberately puzzling poster on HIV/AIDS but after the surveyors gave the subjects some time to have a conversation with their



Fig. 1:

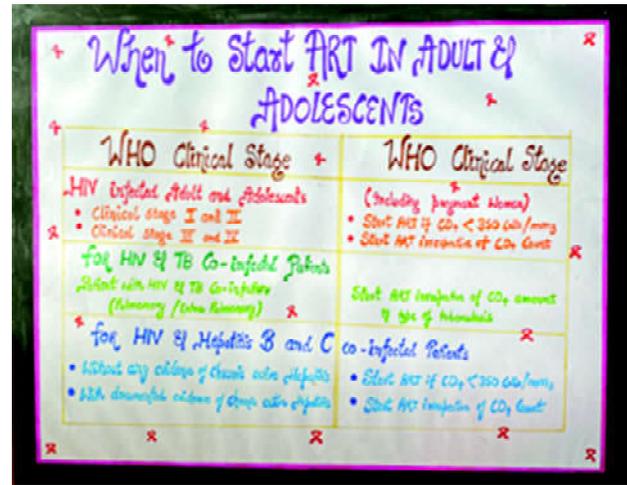


Fig. 6:

peer group about it and to further read about the message, it was seen that the actual comprehension was greater than the perceived comprehension⁸.

This sort of curiosity and excitement cannot be induced by larger media since they have too much information to be looked upon and in today's fast moving life, no one has the time to ponder on that one word amongst a thousand that they might read in a book or in an information pamphlet, but one word out of the hundred in a poster can do this magic. Also, if present at a place where the viewer has to be stationary for a long-time (e.g., metro rail, offices, waiting areas of hospitals, or universities), then a poster can have a deep and promising impact on the viewer's mind. This was also studied by Ward *et al* on patients waiting in the reception area of their general practitioners, wherein they reported that 82% patients read the posters placed in the waiting area, and 95% of those remembered the information mentioned in the posters⁹.

In a long duration study conducted in Mexico, Tepichin reported that out of the multiple methods used to convey the same information across the four phases of their study, posters were the most impactful medium. While other media also received certain backlash, posters were highly useful in disseminating knowledge related to HIV/AIDS, which was accepted by teenagers and older age groups alike¹⁰.

Accessibility

Since its invention, internet has proven to be the most potent way of disseminating knowledge and information, but it is a known fact that almost 45% of the world

population and 60% of Indian population is still without internet and multimedia access¹¹. In such a scenario, posters can act as an excellent medium of spreading awareness amongst all strata of the community equally. Xiao *et al* reported in their study based in China that exposure to HIV/AIDS prevention information delivered by posters, Internet and the other forms of media was found to be associated with communication about HIV or condom use with sexual partners and their study showed an increased trend of awareness regarding issues related to HIV/AIDS¹². In India, posters should be put up at every possible display area ranging from those in villages to those inside MNC lounges in skyscrapers. Regarding HIV, posters can be prepared for such a wide array of dominions (awareness for prevention, modes of transmission, onset of symptoms, availability of treatment, government schemes for PLHIV, etc.) each of which will prove to be extremely helpful in creating a positive propaganda towards management of HIV/AIDS.

Preparing a poster

Preparing an effective poster involves a multistage process starting from planning and organisation, to picking the right information and the figures to be displayed, and to its presentation at a spot where it is accessible to a greater mass. The first step is planning for the poster, this includes deciding upon a topic that needs to be highlighted, the way in which it should be highlighted and the group that has to be targeted. The next step is organising the available data and illustrations into a meaningful and eye-catching poster. It is important to keep the font size big enough to be seen from some distance. It is also important to maintain a contrast relationship between the background and the font colour and to highlight the important words/phrases as much as possible. The main aim should be drawing attention towards the essence of the poster and the data upon which the poster should incite the viewer to further ponder upon.

Stage 1: Planning

The very first step of preparing a poster is planning about what is to be displayed. It is an integral step since it determines how impactful the message can be. It must involve deciding upon which aspect of information related to HIV is to be displayed and how it has to be displayed - via text or via illustrations. Another aspect of planning has to be the determination of a target group. To convey the same information, different methods can be required while

targeting different groups in the society. A viewer's reaction to a poster depends on his interests, inclinations and especially on his social situation. Consequently, each viewer may interpret a poster differently, based on his/her origin, the background, and socio-financial realities. In a study conducted by Quek *et al*, it was reported that subjects from low-income families and relatively less academically successful schools knew significantly less than other subjects¹³. This highlights the importance our last point that different groups require different methods to be conveyed the same information. Simpler terms and easily recognisable illustrations should be used in posters aimed at propagating knowledge to aforementioned group of subjects.

Stage 2: Organisation

Organising the available data into a meaningful propaganda is an important part of the complete process of making a poster. It must include organising the more important data in a more highlighted way than the lesser important texts. As correctly pointed out by Laver, educating about prevention of HIV/AIDS is more than telling people what not to do¹⁴. In the step of organisation one must keep in mind to give optimum weightage to actions which must be done by people who have not contacted HIV (like condom use, regular check-ups, etc.) and the ones that must be done by people living with HIV (like undergoing antiretroviral therapies, informing previous partners about their condition, etc.).

Stage 3: Printing

In this step it is essential to make sure that the quality of the print as well as the paper is up to the mark. It should be kept in mind that a lot of pictures and illustration stand to pixelate upon printing on a larger sized paper, hence photographs and illustrations of higher resolutions should be preferred. If the message has to be delivered on a smaller scale and to limited audience, traditional chart paper and crayons can be used to prepare a poster. This will also be useful in scenarios where limited resources are available. Graphic aids like photographs, pictures, charts, graphs and cartoons can be used to convey longer messages in smaller space. This step must also include choosing the right colour combination between the background and the foreground of the poster so as to make sure that all the information is visible appropriately, even from a considerable distance.

The following considerations must be kept in mind:-

- **Format/size:** Generally, a large format is more noticeable, but a smaller, very bright and colour-intensive poster is more noticeable than a large, dark-coloured poster.
- **Colour of the paper/background:** Use light, not very cloudy colours. For darker colours, the contrast should be considered.
- **Contrast:** Strong contrasts (e.g., light-dark or complementary contrasts) are striking; however, an overload of contrasts should be avoided.
- **Size and conspicuousness of the motif:** Choice of an appealing motif in a size appropriate to the format, wherein originality and recognition should be the drivers.
- **Title/slogan:** Most effective and appealing slogan (an explanation, question or antithesis) should be used, so as to give out a much larger information in much lesser words.
- **Type and size of the font:** Choose a font that is easy to read and in line with the "character" of the poster.
- **Remote readability:** All the mentioned points have a major impact on the perception of the poster, thus the context of use must be considered.
- **Contents/information:** Information on the message to be conveyed should be legible and included in "exposed" areas of the poster.

Stage 4: Presenting the poster

AIDS posters are a material objects and the image of AIDS is considered in terms of their function and for a regime of power centred on the human body¹⁵. Their conclusion is suggestive of the importance of right presentation of a poster on AIDS which marks the most important step of making and presenting a poster. Not only the site but also the way of presenting a poster leaves a lasting mark inside the mind of a viewer.

Not much is required to be done if it is an audiovisual poster, but in a small media printed poster a lot of thought has to be given to the site where the poster must be placed. The determination of site must include the proposed target group as the criteria because placing a poster intended for the low-income group inside an expensive shopping complex would practically be a waste. Also, it must be kept

in mind that presentation must include components which would give a positive outlook to the poster and can virtually speak for the poster. For example, placing a poster on promotion of condom use near a pharmacy would encourage people more towards condom use than placing the same poster next to a cinema multiplex.

Topics to be covered

The topics for posters will be according to the priorities fixed by the healthcare providers and planners. In an exploratory study, it was found that inclusion of both gain- and loss- messages in posters lead to better impact on the viewer¹⁶. Thus it must be kept in mind while deciding upon the topics to be covered that the presentation of the selected topic must have scope for propagation of both gain and loss ideas to the viewers.

HIV/AIDS holds a complete spectral horizon of subtopics and components that must be conveyed to the society. The particular topics that we propose, which hold utmost importance in today's time, are:-

- Modes of transmission of HIV infection.
- Potential methods of prevention of transmission of HIV (Fig. 7).
- Crude data about current status of HIV in the society.
- Onset of symptoms in patients who contract HIV.
- Screening methods for HIV.
- Steps to be taken once a person is infected with HIV.
- Myths and stigmas about HIV/AIDS.
- Awareness and knowledge about mother-to-child



Fig. 7:

transmission of HIV/AIDS.

- Therapies available for HIV/AIDS.
- When to start and how to proceed with antiretroviral Therapies.
- Ways of prevention of further spread of HIV from an infected person.

Conclusion

Posters will continue to constitute an important medium/instrument to combat the HIV epidemic. They are economical and an effective mode of disseminating information on all aspects of HIV to the common man. They should be aggressively utilised in campaigns against HIV.

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