

Involvement of students in a leprosy health education programme—an experiment

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Accepted for publication 4 December 1987

Summary The students participation at college and high school level can be obtained for leprosy health education programmes if proper motivation is given, involving non-leprosy agencies such as the student community will help to overcome the stigma of leprosy in society. The experiment of 'Involvement of College Volunteers' and 'Mitra' are described and have the potential to spread to other regions.

Introduction

Leprosy programmes are usually run with a shortage of manpower and inadequate finance. The involvement of non-leprosy agencies at different levels in leprosy programmes is left as the ultimate strategy in the present situation, and is also likely to expediate the process of removing stigma about leprosy in society. The student population at college level or at high school level are always enthusiastic, having open minds to absorb new messages. They are bound to be decisionmakers in their families, and in turn society too, and thus working with them is thought to be rewarding. A brief account of the experiment by our organization which has been running for more than 3 years, and involves the students in health education programmes on leprosy is presented here.

Involvement of college students in leprosy health education and treatment programme

METHOD

An advertisement in a newspaper regarding the participation of college students in the leprosy programme was printed 1 month before the October and Summer vacations and the same notice was also circulated in colleges in Bombay city.

Interview technique. The group interview technique was adopted by calling the applicants in batches of 20. After a 20-minute health education talk on leprosy with audiovisual aids, students were asked to fill in an objective type questionnaire. Then they were allowed to ask questions on leprosy and each student was asked to describe the picture projected on the screen. The pictures were of natural scenery, graphs, cartoons etc. The group interview technique saves time and there were no grumbles or grudges from candidates who were not selected.

Training of the college volunteers. Approximately 20 students were selected in each vacation for a further training programme of 3 days as the health educator in leprosy.

The topics covered in the training programme are as follows:

1, introduction; 2, clinical demonstration of different types of leprosy cases; 3, hints on how lectures can be made effective; 4, practical demonstration of working of audiovisual aids; and 5, demonstration of audiovisual educative set.

Lecture series on leprosy; 1, health problems in India; 2, leprosy update; 3, leprosy control programme in Bombay city; 4, demonstration of *M. leprae* under microscope; and 5, video cassette on leprosy.

1, Attend the health education talk on leprosy in slum or chawl; 2, group discussion on news items on leprosy, posters on leprosy. etc; 3, video cassette on leprosy; and 4, feed-back of training programme.

Participation. These trained college student volunteers were expected to participate in the leprosy health education programme in the following stages.

Stage 1 The college volunteer accompanied the senior person when the senior person gave a health education talk on leprosy.

Stage 2 The volunteer organized the health education talk in chawls, slums or schools and the senior person delivered the lecture on leprosy.

Stage 3 The volunteer organized and gave a talk on leprosy.

When the volunteer reaches the third stage, they are given Rs.20/-per talk as a remuneration. This helps the college volunteers to earn money while learning and gaining the confidence to face the community leaders and audiences of the different sectors of society. These efforts also help in the development of their personalities. The college volunteer was asked to report on their talk on leprosy and feed back was asked, without their knowledge, from the leader of the place where they had delivered the lecture. The responses were quite encouraging. In order to keep the students association in touch with our organization and with other volunteers the monthly meeting was called on Sundays when they were allowed to do a brief audiovisual presentation on a topic of their choice, other than leprosy, and to discuss the difficulties which they came across in field conditions.

RESULTS

The leprosy organization has benefited by getting more health education talks at 30% of the cost of routine leprosy health education services (see Table 1).

Table 1. Cost of health education talks given by students

Batch	No. of applications received	No. of candidates selected	No. of candidates with active participation	No. of health education talks given	Population covered	Expenditure (Rupees)
October 1984	102	21	10	70	5324	2364/-
May 1985	59	17	4 }	322	39638	8499/-
October 1985	32	12	2 }			
May 1986	57	23	3 }	276	27577	8800/-
October 1986	52	19	6 }			
Total	302	92	25	668	72539	19663/- Rs.29/- per health education talk.

The same students were requested to participate in leprosy treatment programmes and with the help of 8 students, the multidrug therapy programme was successfully launched at 7 leprosy colonies situated in and around Bombay city.¹ This has given them an opportunity to put into 'practice' what they used to 'preach' and 'teach'. The initial aggressive therapy of 21 days and the subsequent monthly pulse therapy was managed by them successfully and 260 infectious leprosy patients benefitted. The expenses incurred were Rs.486/- per month for the treatment of 260 leprosy cases which is 50% cheaper than using the services of the full-time leprosy workers of the regular programme. All 7 students can now take skin smears and check patients' urine in field clinics for DDS content by 'DDS Tile Test'.

The college undergraduate students can be involved successfully in leprosy health education and treatment programmes. It is cheaper and effective and acts as an auxiliary force to augment routine services in leprosy.

Involvement of high school students in health education programmes of leprosy

METHOD

In order to get the participation of high school students in the health education programme of leprosy the 'Mitra' (Friend) project was initiated 3 years ago. 'Mitra' is a 4-page monthly bulletin in which 1 page is devoted to leprosy and other diseases giving scientific information and orientation programmes such as 'do it yourself'. Through this the attempt is made to develop a rapport between students and the leprosy organization. Ten such issues of 'Mitra' per year were sent to the student subscriber on subsidized membership of Rs.3/- per year along with 30 leprosy seals which were Rs.3/-. They were expected to paste these leprosy seals on their mailing. They were also requested to write a leprosy slogan such as 'Leprosy is curable' in prominent places in the villages. They took an oath that they were friends of leprosy patients, that they know the scientific facts about leprosy and that they would not hate leprosy patients. Penfriend activity among them was also established. It is expected to be a student-to-student programme through 'Mitra' student subscribers.

'Get-togethers' (Mitra Melava) of students were organized at the institute as well as in the schools in Maharashtra, who responded to the request for them to get involved in the leprosy health education programme.

In a full 1-day session of 'Mitra Melava' the following programme is expected to be completed.

1, Talk on leprosy with audiovisual aids; 2, visit to leprosy hospital and talk with leprosy patients (when it is at our institute); 3, practical demonstration of 'Solar Stove', filmstrips on science, the experiments revealing the science behind magic tricks; 4, group discussion on leprosy; 5, quiz competition on leprosy; and 6, oath of leprosy.

A total of 59 get-togethers were organized in 3 years, 21 were held in Bombay and 38 in Maharashtra.

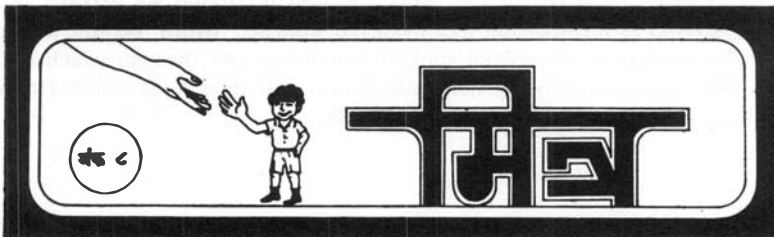


Figure 1. Emblem of 'Mitra'

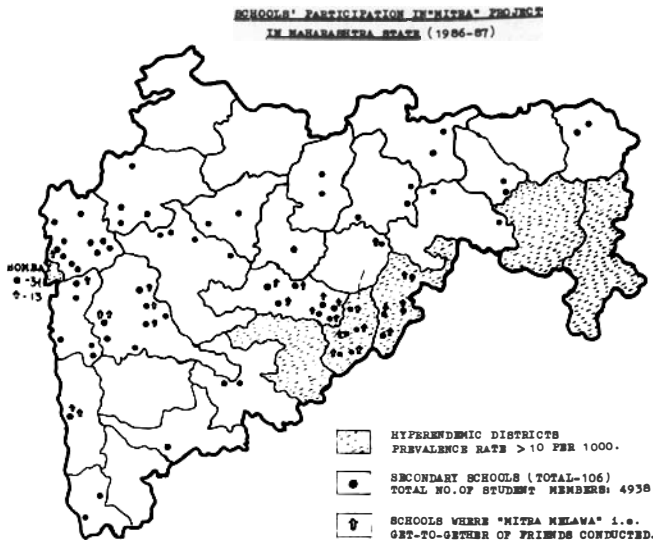


Figure 2. Schools' participation in the 'Mitra' project in Maharashtra State, 1986-87.

Table 2. Participation in 'Mitra' project

Year	Number of schools participated	Members of 'Mitra'		
		Students	Individuals	Total
1984-85	81	2827	425	3282
1985-86	79	3847	633	4480
1986-87	106	4802	520	5322

RESULTS

When considering student-hours participation in the leprosy programme one has to take into account that 250 students cooperated with the leprosy institute by pasting leprosy seals on their post (of which 58 became penfriends), 95 students have written a slogan about leprosy in public places and S.T. Stands with coloured chalk and 35 students pasted the leprosy posters in different places. They also relayed information on leprosy to their parents and friends. Two students could detect early leprosy cases. Two schools had taken part by displaying a project model on leprosy in an annual science school exhibition, and one of them received an award. One hundred and eight schools (teachers and headmasters) received leprosy messages and schools displayed 'Mitra' issues on their noticeboard for the information of other students.

The yearly expenses incurred for the 'Mitra' project is around Rs.50,000/- out of which Rs.15,000/- is received as membership fees from the students. 'Mitra' became a simple tool to communicate the message to the school student population and through which a 5% positive response is received by way of active participation. 'Mitra' activity is being initiated in 'Konkani' in the Goa region in the next academic year, i.e. 1987-88.

Reference

- Ganapati R, Naik SS, Revankar CR, Vartak RB, Desai AP, Panvalkar NA, Deshpande SS. Supervised administration of multidrug therapy in leprosy colonies through volunteers—A bacteriological assessment. *Indian J Lepr*, 1986; **58**: 86-90.