

YOUTH AND HIV

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Keywords: Youth, HIV, AIDS

Respected Sir,

“Young people are the key person in fight against HIV-AIDS. By giving them support they need, we can empower them to protect themselves against the virus; by giving them honest and straightforward information, we can break the circle of silence across all societies; by creating effective campaign for education and prevention, we can turn young people’s enthusiasm, drive and dreams for future into powerful tools for tackling the epidemic.”

-Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, in a speech given at Zhejiang University, China, in October 2002, where he received an honorary doctorate¹

Youth is man, youth is woman, youth is straight, youth is MSM, youth is street worker, and youth is injecting drug user, too, youth is also orphan; infect youth is everyone...they represents everyone. They are the generation ‘X’. Whatever happens to them today will determine what becomes of our communities, societies and nation in a decade ahead, because youth is the future. But, the future does not seem good...Future is dying...Everyday 6000 of 15-24 year old youngsters become infected with a tiny virus, known to us as HIV. Almost half of all new HIV infections occur amongst youngsters; leaving 11.8 millions of them suffering from HIV.¹ Young generation also have amongst them the highest rate of STIs. From denial of information, education and services; to gamble that youngsters play for curiosity and experiment; from their tender age of rapid emotional, physiological and hormonal changes; to their anatomical vulnerability...make young, especially young women, the easiest prey of this deadly disease, AIDS. And, it’s only and only in their hands to do whatever they need to do to protect themselves from this moron.

Provided with necessary means, skills & training, youngsters can become important advocates for their special reproductive and sexual health needs. Given the possibility to speak up, they can introduce more youth sensitive perspective to the policy making process. By being responsible persons and having responsible sexual behavior, by indulging only in protected sex and consistently using condoms, by delayed indulgence in sexual

activity and avoiding sex with prostitutes; they can protect themselves and by spreading the same take home message to their friends, they can protect other youngsters, too. From participating in regional groups and conferences on HIV-AIDS to organizing drama, street plays, sports tournaments etc. for awareness purpose; from joining red-ribbon club at colleges to following Global Youth Collision on AIDS (GYCA) on facebook; from appreciating efforts of making Pretty Zinta like young face goodwill ambassador of UNAIDS and launching of red ribbon express to active participation by youngsters themselves in peer education activity of their isolated under privileged friends to reduce their risk taking behavior, by reaching to each other and identifying with each other linguistically and culturally, by understanding each other’s problems and respecting each other’s decisions non judgmentally and non critically, by acting as role models to each other ...whoever, however can do whatever little should and must do...

Youngsters today form 47% of India’s population² and they are not a mere HIV statistic. They are living dynamic persons who happen to love life. According to Gurucharan Das, former chief executive of Procter & Gamble Co. India, youngsters are the ‘found’ generation of new India.² And henceforth, the youth has a request to make to the adults, “Can adults find it in themselves to trust the young generation a little bit? Youth is responsible and capable of making sensible decisions, in matters of life that affect them the most.¹ Allow them to do that.

Treat them as partners and not inferiors. Youth is waiting for a dawn when there will be dynamic fusion of their creativity, enthusiasm and fresh ideas with elder's knowledge, experience and wisdom. After all those were the elders, who gave world the convention on right for children and youngsters. So now, break this web of stigma, discrimination, ostracism and shoo...shaa... about AIDS. Can't 'Grown-ups' see, those are the root fertilizers of this epidemic? Start talking with youth! Youngsters have made their choices, now it's for the elders to decide, 'Which is more embarrassing for them? Talking with their child of sex or seeing him die of HIV?'¹ Choice is all theirs."

What needs to be done is no secret, by not fulfilling our promises we all are simply running out of excuses.

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This article has been awarded first price in Inter College Elocution Competition organized by Gujarat State AIDS Control Society and Surat Municipal Corporation on occasion of World AIDS Day 2011 Celebration at Surat.