

#POSITIVE LEARNING

GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY No. 3

Reducing stigma in higher education in India



The overall rate of HIV infection in India is relatively low but the sheer size of the population means this equates to 2.3 million people.¹ The HIV epidemic is primarily concentrated among key populations who experience particularly high levels of stigma and discrimination. **In 2020, almost a third of adults in India showed discriminatory attitudes towards people living with HIV.¹**



St Xavier's College in Ahmedabad, Gujarat conducted a project to see if a stigma reduction framework could be successfully applied to a higher education setting. First the college management were convinced of the need for such an initiative. Then 17 faculty members were trained in stigma reduction and, in turn, trained 64 students. The project encouraged them to reflect on personal values, drivers and manifestations of stigma, and attitudes towards people living with HIV. Importantly, the project also encouraged participants to interact with community-based organisations (CBOs) and meet with female sex workers, members of the gay and transgender communities and people living with HIV. Students shared their experiences and the changes they underwent at a reflection meeting following these visits and then conducted a campaign to take the project's key messages to 300 of their peers on campus. Pre- and post-surveys showed an overall positive shift in attitudes towards key populations and people living with HIV.



- * Blaming attitudes towards PLHIV regarding 'wrong' or immoral' behaviour decreased from 21% to 5%.
- * The proportion of students who tested for HIV increased from 9% to 19%.²

The experience of St Xavier's College shows that peer-led approaches that engage students as role models are important in educational settings. Gaining early commitment from senior leadership and training faculty members helped to mainstream stigma reduction within the institution, and linking with CBOs working with key populations helped to facilitate reflection and attitude change.



“
I have learnt so much from this 17 year-old boy who is living with HIV.”

Student after a contact visit

“
I used to be scared of HIV before but after the training I feel it is not something to fear.”

Faculty member

¹ <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/india>

² https://www.icrw.org/files/images/web_ICRW_STRIVE_India%20stigma%20framework_0.pdf