

Module 5: HIV/AIDS and young people - Adolescent health and development with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health - Assignment

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Nearly 5 million young people (15-24 years) are infected with HIV globally. Most infections are sexually transmitted, sexuality and sexual behavior are initiated during adolescence which makes young people more susceptible to HIV infection.

Empowering young people to protect themselves from HIV represents one of UNAIDS' Goals, with the overall goal of a 30% reduction in new HIV infections by 2015.

Second goal, by 2010, ensure that 95 per cent of youth (15-24 years of age) have information, education, services and life skills that enable them to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection.

There are different types of HIV epidemics; Iraq is one of the countries with low-level scenario (HIV prevalence level below 1%) and HIV has not spread to significant levels within any subpopulation groups.

There are groups of young people who might be at high risk due to political instability and social conflicts in Iraq. Those at high risk among young people include:

1. Young people who live without parental care (on the street) or live with other relatives without appropriate family support or those who have dropped out of school or have limited access to information and education.
2. Other vulnerable group is those young people who live in extreme poverty, have been displaced through war (internally or externally) or have migrated between rural and urban areas or outside of their country searching for employment. Although all young people are considered at risk of acquiring HIV in general, certain socioeconomic circumstances within the country context make certain groups of young people at higher risk. These groups include the above mentioned subgroups such as those who live without family support or dropped out of school due to adverse socioeconomic conditions, those who are displaced or migrated, etc.
3. Finally, key population at higher risk to acquire HIV include also sex workers and their clients, injecting drug users and men who have sex with men (people with risky behavior).

Interventions which would contribute to achieving the UNAIDS Goals

There are major interventions to prevent HIV among young people and these areas of actions should be provided simultaneously to be effective although each risky group may require adjustments of these interventions according to their specific risk and requirements and arranged according to priorities.

The four major interventions include:

1. Information and education.

2. Opportunities to develop skills.
3. Provision of appropriate health services for young people.
4. Creation of safe and supportive environment.

For example, for young people living without family support who dropped out of school due to socioeconomic reasons, the main intervention would be the creation of safe and supportive environment enabling them to grow in safe circumstances away from conflicts and abuse.

Other interventions for the same group are also important and should be provided at the same time such as education and information about HIV prevention with development of skills to discuss safe sex and enable them to recognize risky behaviors to avoid them, and finally the availability of health services to offer testing and counseling for those at considerable risk.

The sex workers require specific interventions in the form of:

1. Appropriate information about safe sex and the dangers of unprotected sex and STIs prevention including HIV.
2. Information and counseling about dual protection strategy with consistent and correct use of condom (as contraceptive and to prevent STIs including HIV).
3. Availability of reproductive health services for these groups is important, including HIV counseling and testing.

Drug users require specific interventions in form of information on the use of sterile syringes and where to access harm reduction services, in addition to safe and supportive environment to change their risky behavior and acquiring essential life skills to protect themselves.

Assignment document

1. [Ferguson J. HIV/AIDS and young people. Paper presented at: Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research; 2010 Sep 26; Geneva.](#)