

The 'Zeroheroes' Campaign on HIV prevention for MSM

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Issues:

Increasing trend of reported local HIV/AIDS cases and HIV sero-prevalence among Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) in Hong Kong since 2006, and the HIV projection by a consultancy study pointing out that the trend would continue, or even accelerate, if unchecked.

Project:

The project, named the "Zero-heroes" Campaign (Campaign) is the second HIV prevention campaign targeting MSM being undertaken by Red Ribbon Centre, Special Preventive Programme, Department of Health, Hong Kong SAR. It aimed to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS as well as drug-related unsafe sex, and promote safer sex and HIV testing among MSM. Consultation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in HIV prevention and the MSM community was made in a MSM HIV prevention working group during the formulation of the campaign. The word "Zero" was used to make different phases of the Campaign appear in a coherent manner. Promotional materials were in a comical style targeting young MSM. The theme message was that every MSM could be empowered to become "Zero heroes" to achieve "Zero infection", "Zero drug abuse" and "Zero hopelessness". The objectives of the three phases were:

- *"Zero infection"* – risk communication and promotion of prevention of HIV infection and STDs, and avoidance and reduction of risks;
- *"Zero drug abuse"* – dissemination of information on harmful effects of common soft drugs and tackling the increasing trend of abuse of soft drugs, especially in parties where MSM might have sex; and
- *"Zero hopelessness"* – empowerment of MSM to build a healthy relationship, encouragement of safer sex in a supportive manner and promotion of HIV testing for those ever engaged in risk behaviours

The Campaign adopted multiple approaches and made use of various channels and media, including internet, and in collaboration with various stakeholders including NGOs and gay venue owners, so as to reach the MSM community with a wider coverage. Market research played a key role in the Campaign and was done by inviting inputs and comments from owners of MSM venues and MSM community members on publicity materials to be produced so as to make them appealing and attractive to the MSM community.

Results:

Consultation with the MSM HIV Prevention Working Group, venue owners and community leaders proved vital to the success of the Campaign. Inputs and comments received during discussions with various parties served to ensure that the promotional materials and messages being delivered would not reinforce some of the stigmatizations already being

experienced by the MSM community. Concrete messages addressing various and specific concerns of different targeted sub-populations were the results of valuable consultations and discussions.

Posters and souvenirs like condom and lubricant packs, tissue packs with information cards, coasters, underwear and information booklet about harmful effects of psychotropic substances were distributed in MSM-specific venues including bars, saunas, bookstores and massage houses. Core messages about risk of psychotropic substances, safer sex and HIV testing information were delivered. A wide coverage of MSM venues during the distribution of the publicity materials was made possible by an earlier mapping exercise. The coverage of the Campaign was further enhanced by making good use of the internet media such as internet banners, advertisements and editorials in the most popular gay magazines.

Different stakeholders were engaged as early as during the planning and through the whole implementation period of the Campaign. Intensive liaison work with gay venue owners had further strengthened and consolidated our partnership with the community and enhanced their understanding of, support to, and trust in our promotions, which were first built during the first HIV prevention campaign targeting MSM. Such strong links with the MSM community had in turn proved to be vital in our subsequent HIV prevention efforts and work among the MSM community.

Apart from launching the Campaign in over 70 gay venues and media, the Campaign also made good use of the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 2007, one of the most famous gay events in Hong Kong, during which a thirty-second video clip titled “Zero drug abuse” was broadcasted before each film screening.

Over 150,000 pieces of promotional materials were produced and distributed through the 9-month campaign. The Campaign had succeeded in creating a strong and distinct Campaign image and achieving a strong recall among the target audience of the Campaign.

Lessons Learned:

HIV prevention among MSM requires special approaches targeting the needs of the MSM community and the success of related publicity campaigns depends much on the cooperation of, and collaboration with, other stakeholders, especially those of gay venue owners as well as other NGOs.