



Balbir Pasha Stirs Protection Talk Challenge

Over five million people in India are infected with HIV - the second highest figure in the world. Mumbai is the center of the epidemic in India, accounting for an estimated 21% total of new cases of HIV/AIDS. Staggering misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted and a reluctance to publicly discuss the disease are fuelling its spread.



Photo: PSI/Chris Castle

Two men discuss Balbir Pasha's fate in a still image from a campaign commercial.

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Results

A survey on the campaign found a marked improvement in the public's understanding of how HIV is transmitted and a consequent change in attitudes and behavior. Among men who practiced high risk behavior, the proportion that felt they would be at high-risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through unprotected sex with a partner increased from 17% to 43% after the campaign. Calls to a HIV/AIDS hotline featured in the campaign increased by 250%. More than half of the survey respondents had talked about a Balbir Pasha advertisement with friends, family or colleagues. A follow-up campaign will be launched leveraging the Balbir Pasha character by examining a person's high-risk behavior – such as having multiple partners – to determine if he or she will “become the next Balbir Pasha,” destined to face the probability of HIV infection. The campaign is now being adapted and replicated in Tamil Nadu, the southern-most state of India.

Initiative

USAID is helping implement an innovative and aggressive HIV/AIDS education and awareness campaign in twelve major port communities across India to dispel widespread myths surrounding HIV/AIDS. The program's goal is to open channels of communication, enabling those at high risk of infection to learn how to steer clear of the disease.

In Mumbai, the program showcases an advertisement campaign with Balbir Pasha, a fictional character which young, urban men can relate to, learn from, and empathize with. Presented in an approachable and familiar manner, Balbir Pasha personalizes HIV risk and brings the topic of HIV/AIDS into the open.

Through the multimedia campaign, Balbir is portrayed in a series of identifiable, real-life situations in which he runs the risk of contracting HIV. Scenarios concern the use of alcohol and forgetting to use a condom, the mistaken belief that having a regular partner means one is safe from HIV/AIDS infection, and the misconception that if one's partner looks healthy, he or she must be free of HIV/AIDS.

Case Study

