

Group named `So What' is helping patients between 10 and 22 yrs of age deal with the virus and inculcate a positive outlook

Being a child with HIV can be a traumatic experience. Now, a group named `So What' aims to help patients, aged between 10 and 22, combat psychological issues and embrace life.

It is formed by a city NGO, Prayas, which is run by Dr Sanjeevani and Dr Vinay Kulkarni.

“This group is especially for those who are born with HIV and reaching adolescence,” said Dr Sanjeevani Kulkarni, director of the NGO. “Our counselors noticed that many children show withdrawal symptoms and depression on reaching puberty. When we spoke to them, we realised that they had issues and pre-conceived ideas related to family life.”

“They thought that they could never find happiness or love. While healthy children came up with many questions in a sex education workshop conducted by us two years ago, children born with HIV kept to themselves. This led us to start this group where they can share their life and discuss issues,” she added.

The success of these workshops are evident as two HIV positive couples have opened up enough to fall in love and are planning to get married. “At the workshop, we educate them about sexuality and teach them to stick to medications, importance of drug adherence and positive approach towards life.”



One such beneficiary, Rahul (name changed), a school dropout, who gained confidence and is now in his final year graduation, said, “My father died due to HIV and my mother never informed me about my status. It was only after I turned 13, I was given a hint by the counselor at an ART centre. I went into depression and stopped taking medication. However, after counseling at Prayas and meeting people like me, my attitude changed. Now I am one of the core team members of `So What'.”

Dr Vinay Kulkarni, director and founder of the NGO, said, “Children are not usually told their status early but the counselors at the government-run ART centres should do so tactfully. It should be done when the child is between five and 12 years of age. Many participants in this group are without families and stay alone. Children with HIV-positive parents have no support of relatives. Majority of the group members have lost their parents to HIV. This keeps them away from social life and thus causes a hindrance in discussing issues related to love, family, sex and survival.”

“Through this group, we are trying to inculcate a positive approach and are planning workshops at district levels in the next six months in Solapur and Pune ART centres. We are inviting teenagers to join this group,” Kulkarni added.

Source

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