

Hiv Epidemic in the Educational System of the Russian Federation: The Search for Solutions



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Abstract.

Under UNESCO's 'Education for All' initiative, we conducted research on how to best improve the quality of education for children affected by the HIV epidemic and to provide support for educators and school staff with HIV. This paper will describe the work led by our Centre under the support of the UNESCO office in Moscow, including the 'Recommendations for the implementation of the policy regarding HIV infection in the educational system of the Russian Federation' and the regional 'Practical recommendations for the implementation of the policy regarding the educational system of Eastern Europe and central Asia countries'.

Key words: *HIV, AIDS, education system, education policies, UNESCO, education for all, programme evaluation.*

The problem of HIV infection is significant in Russia. Today thousands of adults and children, who are living with or are affected by HIV, work and study in the educational system of the Russian Federation. Special legal and regulatory framework has been developed to regulate HIV prevention field work and to avoid any discrimination towards people living with HIV (PLH). Nevertheless, negative attitudes and stigma towards such people is still a present-day issue. Children form the most vulnerable group. The attitude of school administration, teachers, and parents towards children with HIV is ambiguous. Such children can be denied admission to educational institutions, forced to be expelled, etc.

Our Centre ran a number of studies between 2008 and 2010. During this period more than 8500 pedagogues, approximately 180,000 students, and more than 80,000 parents participated in the research. The studies took place in educational institutions at the primary and secondary level. In 2012 we studied the attitude of students, their parents, and teachers towards HIV prevention work in the education system. The students were asked to express their opinion on PLH and to evaluate the possibility of their individual contact with such people in public places. 100% of the students expressed their sympathy for such people, 91% expressed pity, and 96% expressed compassion. However, only 9% of students agreed to eat in the same cafeteria as HIV-positive people. Though 85% of parents stated they could communicate or work with a person who has HIV, 95% would prohibit their children from communicating with classmates whose parents have HIV.

The majority of teachers interviewed believe that it would be helpful to make the HIV status of people publicly known. 32.7% of these teachers thought that it would help them not to get infected, 29% thought it will help to make interpersonal relationships more genuine, 23.6% thought it would help them understand how to behave in such circumstances. Meanwhile, 18.3% of teachers were against the idea of making HIV status public information because of the possible panic in the institution and because of potential conflicts that may arise between PLH and other members of the group (10.9%). The teachers also stated that there are no HIV infected children that they know of or children whose family members have HIV in their schools. 83% of interviewed pedagogues believe that HIV-positive students can learn together in a normal class. Therefore, the study has shown that the teachers are more tolerant towards PLH than students and their parents.

In 2011-2012, with the support of the UNESCO Moscow office, we developed recommendations for the implementation of policy concerning HIV infection in the educational system of Russia for the UNESCO programme 'Education for All'. The programme aims to provide equal access to education for socially vulnerable children. We also participated in the development of 'Practical Recommendations for the Implementation of Policies Concerning HIV in Education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia'. In 2012, with the support of the Russian Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science, we conducted a school-based HIV prevention programme. One of the goals of the project was to create tolerant attitude towards PLH and people around them. 4564 educational institutions situated in all 83 federal subjects of Russia participated in the project: 8699 teachers, 169044 students and 88082 parents.

The HIV epidemic is becoming one of the most urgent health issues in Russia and in the world. Taking into consideration the special needs of HIV-positive staff and students allows the educational system to become adaptive and accessible for all categories of people, especially those with special needs.

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