

### **Media for Health: Planning, Programmes and Practices**

Binod C. Agrawal (ed.), 2009, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 13: 9788180696107, hard cover, pp. 198, price: 500

The book, a compendium of eleven papers, attempts to examine the role of media in publicising health information and thereby educating the masses on various health issues. The papers are research based and are organised into four sections.

The thrust of the first section of the book is HIV/AIDS and communication strategies. There are four papers in the section. (i) The paper by Binod C. Aggarwal and Md. Irfan is a comparative analysis of exposure to mass media and awareness of HIV/AIDS and RTI (reproductive tract infection)/STI (sexually transmitted infection) among the scheduled tribes of two states in India - Chhatisgarh and Nagaland. The paper is based on the reproductive and child health (RCH) survey conducted in the year 2002 in the two states. The paper reports that compared to television, interpersonal communication with friends, relatives and health workers has been the more important source of information on HIV/AIDS and RTI/STI. (ii) The paper of Binod C. Agrawal, Kalyan Brata Saha and Irfan Khan is on the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women in the three states of Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. The database for the paper is a large scale rapid household survey carried out by the RCH project sponsored by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (1998) in 18 districts covering the three states. The paper reported that the level of awareness about HIV/AIDS was higher among Christians compared to Hindus, and that women in Nagaland had the highest level (83.3%) of awareness compared to women of Meghalaya (55%) and Assam (37.2%). (iii) Arbind Sinha in his paper discusses the health communication needs of the people of the state of Madhya Pradesh and the functioning of IEC (information, education and communication) in the state. It uses the data of a study of 24 villages of six different geo-cultural backgrounds from Madhya Pradesh. The study showed

lack of adequate awareness among the population about the health issues and services and emphasised the need of strengthening IEC through training of the staff working in health sector. (iv) Chakrabarty and Patel in their paper assess the impact of social marketing on availability, acceptability and accessibility of condom in the selected high risk areas of the state of Gujarat. It is based on the study in 11 districts of Gujarat, as identified by the Gujarat State AIDS Control Society, where condom promotion programmes were implemented. The study revealed that common people, even of the high risk category, hesitated to buy and use condoms due to cultural stigma of considering those who buy condom as individuals who have illicit relationship or suffer from STI or HIV/AIDS.

The second section of the book focuses on government health services in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and has two papers. (i) Irfan Khan in his paper critically examines the issues of health communication and services being rendered at grassroots level in Madhya Pradesh. The paper uses the primary data collected by the author from 969 respondents in Madhya Pradesh, and the secondary data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and the RCH reports (1998-99). Based on the results of these three studies the paper reports that, though the awareness of existing health facilities has been almost universal, the beneficiaries are not sure about the type of services made available to meet their unmet needs. Currently most of the services are limited to immunisation, family planning and to some extent childcare, leaving aside the other health programmes. (ii) Khan and Agarwal in their paper attempt to analyse the perception about the government health services in Maharashtra. The paper is based on the analysis of the data collected from three health surveys conducted in Maharashtra (RCH Project - Rapid Household Survey 2002; Facility Survey under RCH Project 1999; and Satisfaction Assessment of Patients and Health Providers 2002). The three surveys indicated a positive picture of Maharashtra health services and people's satisfaction of them. The overall observations, however, pinpointed two broad areas of concern, viz. effectiveness and quality of health services in the state.

Section three of the book consists of four papers. (i) Irfan Khan and Mitali Chakrabarty in their paper present the scenario of safe motherhood programme in Madhya Pradesh. The paper is based on the secondary data

from the NFHS-I (1992), NFHS-II (1998-99), and RCH Phase I and II (1998-99) of the Government of Madhya Pradesh. The paper reports that the existing government health facilities have been underutilised and are unable to meet the objective of safe motherhood. The percentage of safe delivery is 28 for Madhya Pradesh compared to 40 for the country as whole.

(ii) Irfan Khan and K.K. Verma in their paper examine the trend of acceptance of contraceptives in India and critically analyse the dynamics between cultural factors and population stabilisation programme. The paper is based on the secondary data obtained from various government documents, and district and national level surveys. The outcome of the studies reported in the paper indicates that the family planning programme has overburdened the women with contraceptive weights. The acceptance of male contraceptives is minimal at 13 per cent, whereas female participation is 87 per cent. (iii) Mitali Chakrabarty in her paper investigates the status and fertility of women among the Jaintia tribe in the state of Meghalaya. Jaintia society is matriarchal and women enjoy high status in the society. Despite this high status, women have a fertility rate of 4.62 which is higher than that of the women in the states of Kerala (2.9) and Andhra Pradesh (3.3). The data also show that fertility is higher ( $4.94 \pm 0.06$ ) among the women who practise the "night visit system" (NVS) than among those who do not practise the NVS ( $4.34 \pm 0.05$ ).

(iv) Chandragupt Sanon and Dhani B. Patel in their paper discuss the issue of the abuse of child rights involved in physical and psychological punishment. It is based on a study conducted in Kutch district of the state of Gujarat. Their study has brought out the negative effects of corporal punishment and has made some recommendations for controlling and eliminating it ultimately.

Section four of the book, constituted of a single paper by Narendra Singh and Binod C Agrawal, discusses the role of magico-religious healers in community health among the tribal communities of the state of Chhattisgarh. The study reported in the paper shows that 90 per cent of the people approach such healers for consultation, diagnosis and treatment. These healers claim that people of all strata of society consult them. The authors of the paper think that the healers could be used as catalysts and involved in health communication strategy for improving the effective utilisation of the state health services.

The sections of the book and the papers in them are well organised. An important strength of the book is that the papers are based on research data from different parts of India. To that extent the contents reflect the reality situation. The book, as the title suggests, not only speaks about the media but also provides concrete suggestions for effective health services and communication strategies, such as the use of locally popular means of communication especially in crossing the ecological barriers of communication in tribal areas.

This book is useful for policy makers in health sector, researchers and social work students. It brings out the need to provide appropriate and accessible health services to the entire population and to educate the masses on various health issues. Creation of healthcare facilities does not necessarily guarantee better health for the people. There is a close correlation between the awareness of health services among people and the provision of quality services. This would mean strengthening of the IEC dissemination mechanism operating from the top (central/state level) to the bottom (village/individual level). To meet the needs of the IEC operations in the state, special training of the staff is required in order to enhance their knowledge and sharpen their skills. The IEC should reaffirm its philosophy of promoting community mobilisation and community participation in public health and family welfare programmes. Timely supply of medicine, vaccines, contraceptives and IEC materials must be assured. The elected panchayat members need to understand and address women's health needs as part of their responsibility. These are some of the useful corollaries that emerge from the different research based papers presented in the book under review.

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