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Workplace Prevention at Yunxi Tin Mining Company

Experiences from the AIDS Response in China

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Background

As one of the key economic sectors in Yunnan, the mining sector employs a large proportion of Yunnan's working age men, many of whom are migrant workers without legal residence permits (*hukou*). The Yunxi Tin Company alone employs approximately 28,000 contracted workers and an estimated additional 50,000 migrant workers, a high proportion of which work on the company's mine sites in and around Gejiu. Research conducted by the US National Institute of Health in 2007 and 2008 indicates that the prevalence of HIV and other STIs is increasing at an alarming rate in the area. The prevalence of STI infections amongst miners in Gejiu was reported in 2008 as 1.8% for HIV, 14.9% for herpes simplex, 2.4% for syphilis, 2.1% for gonorrhoea, and 6.5% for chlamydia. Overall, 23.2% of miners in Gejiu were infected with at least one STI.¹

Gejiu was formerly the location of the county government and has an unusually well-developed entertainment sector. The thriving entertainment sector presents strong temptations to the mine workers, who are often far from their families and social support networks. Various studies have shown that many mine workers have high levels of multi-partner sex and engage in commercial sex. Combining these factors with the low levels of condom

use, it is clear that in Gejiu, mine workers constitute an important bridge population for HIV transmission. Levels of HIV and STI infection among the mine workers themselves are also relatively high, further increasing the part they play in transmission of HIV between those in the entertainment industry and the general public.

An ILO baseline research study conducted in early 2007 showed that knowledge concerning voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) among these miners was practically non-existent, and there was a general distrust of government services. Awareness of care and support services was also very low. Stigma and discrimination was still widely apparent and 65% of miners surveyed expressed reluctance to work with an HIV positive person. ILO qualitative research showed that very few miners had heard of the national Four Frees and One Care treatment and care policy, and doubted that this policy would provide treatment and care to low-skilled migrants.

“There is a big risk for young miners who buy sex at KTV after work. They are young and only have a little knowledge of HIV prevention. If there's no training for these miners, they may be infected without even knowing it.”

Miner, Gejiu

¹ Xu, Jun Jie, Wang, Ning, Lu, Lin, Pu, Yi, Zhang, Guo Lei, Wong, Michelle, Wu, Zheng Lai, Zheng & Xi Wen. (2008). *HIV and STIs in Clients and Female Sex Workers in Mining Regions of Gejiu City, China. Sexually Transmitted Diseases, 35(6) June, 558-565.*

HIV Workplace Education

Who was the Target	Migrant workers in the mining industry.
Why this Population	Many miners are male migrant workers living away from their spouses, families and communities. Sex worker services are easy to access and affordable for many miners, however knowledge on how to prevent HIV and STIs is low. STI prevalence is high, indicative of high risk for HIV, and take-up of VCT services is low.
How was the Project Implemented	Government, ILO and NGO partners worked with the Yunxi Company. Workplace education was delivered utilising materials from the “Hometown Fellows” campaign, combined with participatory education methods and other educational tools. The Yunxi Company developed a workplace policy on HIV and provided time and space for worker training sessions.
What Happened as a Result of the Project	A significant increase in HIV awareness and knowledge, changed behaviours, and a decrease in the stigmatization of PLHIV. Yunxi developed an HIV policy and training is continuing as a component of workers’ orientation and occupational health and safety programmes.
What is Next	Training is continuing in the workplace and will be expanded to include TB prevention. The Yunxi Company is being used as an example for other companies.

Objectives

- To reduce stigma and discrimination and protect the employment rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- To reduce HIV/AIDS risk behaviours among targeted workers.
- To increase uptake of HIV-related health services including STI treatment, voluntary counselling and testing and AIDS treatment and care.

Initial Advocacy Directed at Company Management

Local Human Resource and Social Welfare departments initiated contact with the company and invited the local CDC and the Family Planning Association (FPA) to join discussions. During the advocacy process, the provincial labour department emphasized the business case for HIV programmes as well as the links to corporate social responsibility. Yunxi agreed to collaborate with the provincial labour department and signed an MOU, which emphasized the company’s contributions and responsibilities for the programme.

Capacity Building and Programme Design

The company formed a committee to manage programme activities, which included human resources and occupational safety and health managers, trade union leaders and mine site managers. The ILO and a team of technical experts from local NGOs and the Gejiu CDC trained the team in programme design, behaviour change communication and monitoring and evaluation. The company assembled a team of trainers from the human resources and health and safety department and



the ILO provided comprehensive training on HIV and AIDS and participatory learning techniques. Working through the trade union, the company assembled a team of peer educators in mine sites and the ILO provided comprehensive training on peer education.

Integrating HIV in HR Management and Training Activities

In order to ensure that HIV prevention work could be implemented in the workplace on a sustainable basis, the Yunxi Group incorporated HIV/AIDS education training into routine training activities, including orientation training for new employees, mine worker safety training, etc. This approach required small investment, but ensured optimal results and high levels of coverage.

Furthermore, with assistance from the local labour department, the company developed an HIV/AIDS policy that was in line with the ILO Code of Practice on HIV and AIDS in the World of Work. The policy eliminated mandatory HIV testing and guaranteed the employment rights of employees with HIV.

Innovative Strategy Promotes Change

A communication strategy was developed to effectively transfer key messages about HIV and AIDS services to workers. The ILO partnered with McCann Healthcare to devise a marketing and communications strategy. The campaign developed featured the famous actor and former migrant worker, Wang Baoqiang, and utilized an overarching theme of migrant worker solidarity and mutual support (Hometown Fellows). The campaign was carried out in several phases, stressing transfer of knowledge, condom promotion, stigma reduction and VCT and STI service promotion.

Learning through Leisure

With the support of the ILO and the local CDC, the Yunxi Group chose three sites to establish drop-in centres.

The drop-in centres are venues where mine workers can spend their leisure time together. The programme provided a series of recreational and educational information products, including HIV prevention playing cards, pop music CDs with health protection themes, etc. The project collaborated with Humana People to People to place outreach workers in the centres to support

intensified prevention activities, in coordination with the local CDC and FPA. The drop-in centres also provided a venue for local IDU support services to establish outreach and service referral. The project developed an online resource centre to provide training tools and in-depth information to both trainers and workers. The site includes interactive training tools, communications materials and service referral information for VCT and STI services.

Partners in Learning

A peer educator team was established to deliver information on HIV and AIDS and to encourage positive behaviour change amongst miners. Partnering with the local CDC and NGOs, the project provided training sessions and ongoing technical support to the peer educators. A range of peer education tools were also developed and distributed to peer educators to facilitate education activities.

“After the training the miner has knowledge about HIV and STD prevention. They know they should use a condom when they buy sex.”

Miner, Gejiu

Establishment of a Referral System

A comprehensive referral system was established in partnership with the local CDC. This included distribution of a service card listing local government and NGO health services, such as VCT, STI testing, and methadone maintenance treatment as well as other services for drug users.

Establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation System

The project developed a simple monitoring system to document programme coverage and report to the local AIDS committee.



Impact

- Broad coverage of mine workers, a significant proportion of whom had reported previously engaging in unprotected commercial sex and injecting drug use
- Deconstruction of gender roles
 - Gender-based inequality is one of the driving forces behind HIV. The programme placed strong emphasis on responsible sexual behaviours of men.
- Facilitating behavioural change in the target population
 - Positive attitudes towards condom use increased from 14.4% to 31.6%. Condom use among workers who had sex with a non-regular partner increased from 43.7% to 74.2%.
 - Workers who reported having intentionally limited the number of partners other than their live-in or stable partner within the last six months, with the aim of reducing their risk of contracting HIV and/or STIs increased from 35.8% to 62.6%.
- Improved knowledge about VCT and free testing/support services
 - Awareness of VCT service availability increased from 28.7% to 80.6%.

- Reduced stigma towards workers living with HIV
 - Accepting attitudes towards people living with HIV within the workplace increased from 5.0% to 52.5%.
 - Reports of workers who believe that physically fit workers with HIV should not be denied workplace opportunities increased from 17.6% to 59.6%.
- Sustainability through involvement of peer educators
 - Emphasis on interpersonal communication and collective support, rather than top-down communication.
- The company developed a workplace policy and ended previous practices of mandatory HIV testing.

Lessons Learnt

The ILO encountered reluctance from business enterprises when approaching them about the concept of HIV prevention programmes. Involvement of the national and provincial labour departments was essential for gaining the commitment of enterprises. Effective interventions focusing on sexual risk and injecting drug use are significantly enhanced through NGO involvement and trade unions and are effective for systematic implementation of peer education.



Further information is available at:

www.ilo.org and www.workonaids.org

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