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Issues addressed

Due to a lack of awareness and knowledge, leprosy leads to stigma and discrimination in the community, which increases misconceptions about disease transmission to others and treatment. The stigma associated with leprosy affects many aspects of life such as social status, employment opportunities, marriage, and family life. It's creating mental anxiety, loneliness, perplexity, and increasing distance between loved ones, relatives, and mainstream society permanently.

Early detection is crucial in the fight against leprosy. However, several key barriers are a lack of awareness, lack of healthcare facilities and diagnostic tools, the stigma and discrimination.

Until today, people affected by leprosy faced leprosy-related stigma and discrimination from the all public domains, their own house & the houses of relatives, schools, hospitals, temples, hotels, parks, public and private transport, factories, industrials, shopping malls, agriculture fields, and rented houses in India. Many people affected by leprosy-related stigmas are isolated from society, living separately in leprosy colonies with poor conditions without new hope.



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Actions taken to solve the issues

APAL conducts awareness programs in schools, colleges, tribal areas, local PHCs, co-educational hostels, press meetings, TV interviews, and in Leprosy Colonies by conducting rallies, quizzes, drawing competitions, posters, and distributing note books and bookmarks. We approached local media, newspapers, and TV Channels and published messages from individuals and leprosy survivors.

Due to a loss of sensation, the people affected by leprosy can get ulcer wounds in their hands and feet. The ulcers require daily dressing to prevent bone infections and amputation of legs and fingers. The visible deformity can cause severe discrimination. For this response, we conducted a POD (Prevention of Deformity) providing ulcer care by SSOD (Soaking Scrubbing Oiling and Dressing). We have also taught the people with leprosy about self-care and self-hygiene.



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Actions taken to solve the issues (cont.)

APAL conducted awareness campaigns, workshops on the rights of people affected by leprosy by SLOs and lawyers, and DOP experts taught them about the stigmatization that occurs among these people. The people were taught to observe the many differences between people with disabilities in India and other developed countries, mainly the Governments of those countries providing inclusive education and employment. Everyone needs to know about their rights and duties and be able to get the information that is available through RTI.

APAL is working with Governments to educate people about the disease and provided support to leprosy-affected individuals. Individuals can also be playing a vital role in creating awareness of leprosy by learning about the disease, spreading awareness in their communities, and advocating for the rights of leprosy-affected individuals.

APAL raised awareness and misconceptions in society about the disease of leprosy and its early detection, therefore helping to reduce stigma and discrimination, and improve access to healthcare facilities and diagnostic tools, especially in underserved areas.



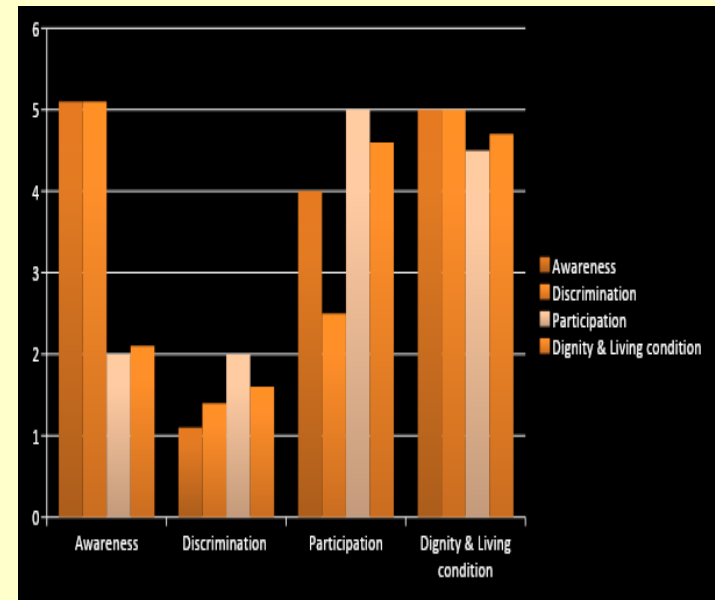
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Results and accomplishments

After the awareness program, the participants gave positive feedback that said "We never discriminate against people affected by leprosy and they have the right to live in the society, as well." This proves that have been successful in changing the minds of the participants on leprosy.

Many changes have been made in the lives of people affected by leprosy living in the leprosy colonies like their way of thinking, an improved way of living, Improving their opportunities to get their basic needs, people getting all social entitlements from the government and some are benefitted by getting lands and houses

The awareness tools concluded that if the community leaders are approached, educated, and properly motivated, they would certainly involve themselves to provide valuable strength to our leprosy health education and control program.

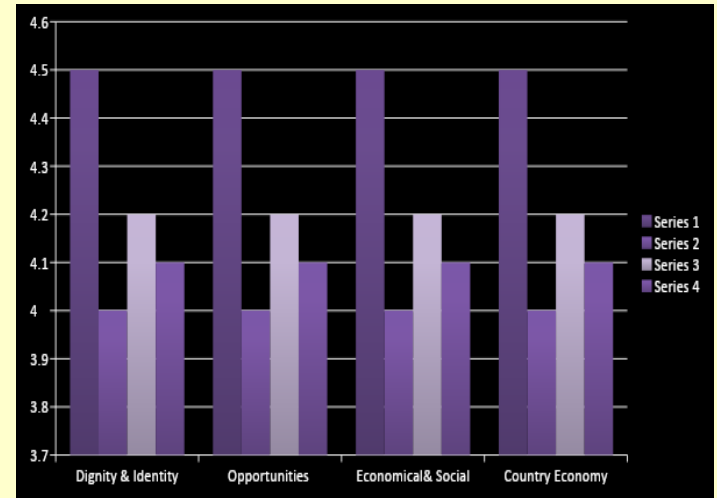


Results and accomplishments (cont.)

APAL's extra efforts through awareness programs have had far-reaching and long-term implications for leprosy control activities in India.

Our achievements through the awareness of the accurate and timely detection of leprosy in these underprivileged communities is an important step towards achieving the goal of leprosy eradication in the near future.

Some people have changed and have been looking towards self-employment instead of begging. Others are capable of approaching the government for their needs like the infrastructure of colonies. Children who live under the shadow of the disease of leprosy are getting education support and vocation training facilities for their better future. More people are getting proper treatment and MCR footwear from the government and NGOs, while others are improving their networking skills and are creating youth forums and self-help women groups



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Lessons learnt from the project

To increase the awareness of leprosy in public rallies, we need permission from the police station in order to gather more people and establish more educational campaigns. As we were preparing for the establishment of educational leprosy programs, some schools rejected our request to conduct the program on leprosy. This therefore decreased the awareness of leprosy among those schools. Our project has also found that awareness through electronic media is much more expensive compared with print media.

SHF and the Nobel man and WHO Goodwill Ambassador for leprosy elimination, Mr. Yohie Sasakawa supported us to conduct an awareness program called the “Don’t Forget Leprosy” program.

Participation of local people such as traditional healers and the previously treated leprosy patients referred to as the ‘Leprosy Champions’ are very useful and are massively supported.

Extra efforts need to be deployed for the control of leprosy in tribal populations because control of infectious diseases in these populations has broader health benefits for non-tribal communities also.



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Lessons learnt from the project (cont.)

The situation persists most likely due to poor health access and lack of awareness among the illiterate population, which negatively impacts their health-seeking behavior at an early stage, thereby allowing transmission to continue.

It is, therefore, important to devise ways to properly counsel and follow up with the patients during and after the treatment.

We learned from the project that even a single new case with a Grade 2 disability or a new case of child leprosy or a female case should be considered evidence of hidden endemicity of leprosy.

We learnt and have been able to prove and made the world aware that leprosy is not contagious and not a untouchable disease through beauty queens and most famous celebrities directly.



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Next Steps

We have conducted an awareness program in all areas and reached 200,000 people in the last 2 years and we plan to reach 5,000,000 people in the next coming years mostly at schools, colleges, and difficult-to-reach tribal areas.

Around 8.6% or 104 million people of India's or tribal's population are still considered to be highly marginalized and discriminated and the rate of decline of leprosy cases in tribal population is much lower than the non-tribal population. APAL focuses on 'difficult-to-reach' areas or remote areas to spread the awareness for the zero discrimination campaign.

We are looking to promote the publication of the negotiation between APAL and the Education Department of the Government in future textbooks in primary education.

