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The Role That Vietnam's Mass Media Plays In Campaigns Against AIDS

By

Nguyen Viet Thang
THE ROLE THAT VIETNAM'S MASS MEDIA PLAYS IN CAMPAIGNS AGAINST AIDS

by NGUYEN VIET THANG

Reporter
Vietnam's Women Newspaper

The HIV/AIDS infection in Vietnam has been increasing very fast threatening human health and lives of Vietnamese people. Since the first case discovered in Ho Chi Minh City in December '90. There have been 1490 cases of HIV/AIDS infection as the 20th of June '94, of which 79 are foreigners and 1411 are Vietnamese. Among these cases, 104 have become the AIDS patient and 34 patients died. In Vietnam, there are 53 provinces and cities as far as administrative division is concerned, of which 30 provinces and Cities where inhabitants have infected from HIV/AIDS and Ho Chi Minh City is ahead in terms of the quantity of the HIV/AIDS infections populations (556 cases) Almost all the infections populations belong to drug pushers and prostitutes, covering 86% and 5% respectively. But these statistics reflect improperly the state-of-the HIV/AIDS infection in Vietnam, as a result of limited testing samples collected and diagnosed. In accordance with the international Epidemiological formula that a formal figure of HIV/AIDS infections cases should be between 10 to 100 times higher than a recorded figure, and by this calculation, there are now 14900-149000 populations who have been infected from HIV/AIDS in Vietnam.

As you are aware that Vietnam had experienced through the fierce war, Human and resources losses have become a heavy burden and a great concern of the whole society. That's why public health care has become an imperative task and has been given top priorities by the Government. The national primary health care programme has been implemented and expended to the grass-root communities throughout the country by the Ministry of Health (MOH), in collaboration with various national institutions at different levels. The HIV/AIDS prevention activities are integrated in the programme.
Unfortunately, to date, no effective medical prescription is available on the world and in countries of modern developed medicines to effectively prevent and treat the AIDS disease. Therefore, the most effective and unique action against the HIV/AIDS infection at this moment, is the public awareness promotion of this incurable disease and its prevention through communication and educational activities.

During the last some years, Vietnam's mass media activities against AIDS can be grouped into periods:

I. THE 1986 - 1990 PHASE

This is an initial phase within that AIDS prevention activities were being performed in Vietnam.

Initially, Vietnamese people merely understood that AIDS was a dangerous and killing disease which people had to keep away from. All they had learnt are the cause, symptoms and development of AIDS disease. So that, at the moment, the mass media had a task focusing on the dissemination of AIDS' information including scientific knowledges in order to promote the public understanding of AIDS. There were many articles published in 350 central-level-newspapers and 53 provincial-level-newspapers carrying tremendous information of AIDS' causes, symptoms and transmissions by local professors and doctors of epidemiology. Subsequently, a lot of information concerning AIDS infection situation in Eastern European and African countries had been transmitted and published.

Or to say in another words, the objective of mass media was to update and improve the people's basic knowledge of AIDS disease and its preventive measures.

II. THE 1991 - 1994 PHASE

Since the first case of HIV infection was discovered in Ho Chi Minh City in December 1990. The threat of AIDS has become apparent in Vietnam this signal has caused much concerns to local authorities and health organizations. A national programme on AIDS preventing activities
has been formulated and carried out throughout the country. Among diverse activities, there has been the public awareness promotion implemented on mass media to facilitate the mass of different cultural level to have access to AIDS disease information. Many publications with different forms were designed and made, such as scientific papers and articles, reports, drama, short and funny stories, etc providing local readers and viewers with a lot of information about AIDS disease, its communicative ways, and its risks and impacts on the Society.

Usually articles focus on the 3 main communicative ways of AIDS disease:

- An easy-going way of sexual relations;
- Blood-born-disease (infection, opium roasting needles, blood transfusion)
- Communicative way from mothers to their fortuses.

+ Preventive measures
- Encourage people to avoid the easy-going way of sexual relations to keep faithful to wife or husband (many articles covered deeply the Vietnamese people's culture and traditions, psychology and conduct or moral).
- Use condoms when making love
- Those women who have infected from AIDS are encouraged to avoid pregnancy, etc.

Further more, a lot of pictures and posters and commercial programmes are used in public areas such as cinema houses, dancing clubs and conference rooms to propagate the prevention of AIDS disease, the Contents vary from different forms of publication such as:

- Let's be vigilant over AIDS.
- Stop AIDS
- Faithful life - one husband and one wife - to avoid AIDS.
- Use of condom, to avoid AIDS.

Nowadays, condom use has become the sexual habit of urban dwellers in all cities and Towns in Vietnam. The TRUST condom is now prevailing throughout Vietnam. The advertisement of TRUST has been continuously
shown on T.V or printed in all personal belongings like bags, raincoats, etc. in Hanoi for example.

Following statistics can tell something about the role that Vietnam’s Mass media plays in AIDS prevention activities.

Since January ’91 to April ’94, there has been a great number of Articles carried on the mass media, of which:

- Television broadcasting : 1,700 programmes;
- Newspapers at the Central and local levels : 1,600 articles

From 1991 up to now, the communication Campaign against AIDS has been planned to publish and communicate all the year round on newspapers and other facilities, but emphasis has been given to the two key periods:

- The first period : during the Spring when foreign visitors used to enter Vietnam making up the increase of visitors and risks of AIDS infection increase.
- The second period : between September and November, is the time to prepare the celebration of the International Day of AIDS Control and Prevention (the first of December).

Day of AIDS Control and Prevention (the first of December). Usually during this period, many press conferences are convened by the National Committee for AIDS Control and Prevention, providing and updating all data and information of global infection of AIDS and the National strategies and policies of the state on AIDS control and prevention in Vietnam, and responsibilities that the mass media can share.

As a result of effective participations of Television, Voice broadcasters, newspapers and other means of communication, the public awareness of AIDS disease among Vietnamese has been promoted. The table below is the result of survey taken place over 4 major cities in Vietnam (Hanoi, Haiphong, Quangnam-Danang and Ho Chi Minh city) by the National committee recently, and the target-population of the survey were grouped at ages between 15 and 49, during 1990 and 1993:
Understanding, Attitudes and awareness of AIDS disease

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Understanding, Attitudes and awareness of AIDS disease</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Proportion of population unknown about AIDS</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Proportion of population properly known about AIDS</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>40.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Proportion of population know about AIDS communicative way of sexual relation</td>
<td>89.70%</td>
<td>96.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Proportion of population know about AIDS communicative way from mothers to their foetuses</td>
<td>69.60%</td>
<td>75.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Proportion of population know about AIDS communicative way of blood transfusion</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>88.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Proportion of population know about AIDS communicative way of injecting with needles without sterilization.</td>
<td>82.60%</td>
<td>92.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Proportion of population known about uses of condoms against AIDS</td>
<td>37.70%</td>
<td>87.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Proportion of population using condoms in sexual relations with different partner</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Proportion of population using condoms in sexual relations</td>
<td>15.30%</td>
<td>31.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Belief of the local serious problem caused by AIDS</td>
<td>37.90%</td>
<td>71.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Proportion of population thought being likely to infect from AIDS</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td>12.64%</td>
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</table>

These figures show that the public awareness promotion of AIDS was increased in 1993 compared to that of 1990 and the important role that mass media has played in the process of AIDS control and prevention in Vietnam.

But it is a fact that the public awareness varies from provinces to province and communities to another as a result of their different cultural levels and different living standards. The 1993 survey taken place over 4 provinces of which 2 are from the South zone and 2 others are from the central zone of the countries has shown some representative differences in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Access to AIDS information by mass media</th>
<th>Access to AIDS information by medical staff</th>
<th>Access to AIDS information by surroundings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ho Chi Minh City</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vung Tau City</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Quang Nam - Danang</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hue City</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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The accessibility to information of Aids also varies from one facility to other, a survey of prostitute groups was carried out by the National Committee over several big cities in 1993 shows the differences.

- Access to information from voice broadcastings : 36%
- Access to information from T.V. broadcastings : 61%
- Access to information from newspapers : 46%
- Access to information through talks : 26%
- Access to information without identifying the sources : 7%

Through the above mentioned data, we can confirm that the mass media would bring in a high efficiency in preventing and controlling AIDS disease, in collaboration with specialized institutions and administrative authorities at different levels, the public health care programme in Vietnam can be implied that children and women groups are given priorities in the provision of health care within the programme. Taking into account the threat of AIDS disease, these groups are particularly looked after during this period. As forecasted and estimated by the National Committee, Vietnam would have 30,000 - 60,000 women and 10,000 - 20,000 children who may be infected from HIV/AIDS by the year 2000. Thus, dissemination and propagation of AIDS disease information among the female society have become a leading task of the Vietnam Women's Newspaper. This newspaper is weekly published (5 issues/month) with a quantity of 500000 copies, carrying a lot of AIDS related information under diverse forms such as news, events, scientific response/query, papers and articles, and translated articles.

Averagely, the newspaper carries about 70 articles of AIDS disease and especially during 1992 and 1993, the newspaper has concentrated in publishing various topics of AIDS, as follows:

- Tourism and Aids;
- Women and Aids; and
- Children and Aids.
Usually on the occasion of the International Day of AIDS Control and Prevention, the newspaper reserves 2 or 3 pages carrying all information and reporting situations of HIV/AIDS in other countries and Viet Nam with following key topics:

- The state-of-HIV/AIDS infection in Vietnam and its risks;
- Prostitution and AIDS;
- Drug Pushers and AIDS;
- Blood transfusion and AIDS;
- Can mosquitoes communicate AIDS disease?
- Can AIDS disease be transmitted by mothers' milk?

The objectives of AIDS public awareness promotion awareness to educate the mass to live in a healthy and faithful life and their responsibilities towards the society. One of the best communication measures in the newspaper is to carry repeatedly all important and necessary information so that readers can absorb as much as possible all the AIDS-related information.

AIDS understanding competitions are another forms attracting the people’s participation throughout the country including women, the Women’s Newspaper organized a country-wide competition of the topic “What do you know about the human life’s essentials”, in collaboration with UNICEF in 1992. This competition involved 100,000 women of the ages between 15-49.

The Questions of AIDS disease include:

- What communicative ways does AIDS transmit?
- What measures can be taken to avoid and prevent AIDS disease?

Through the competition, we have realized that urban women whose comprehension of AIDS disease was better than rural and mountainous women. Some replies received, reflected that part of women misunderstood about AIDS, its transmission and communicative ways, so that these feedbacks have helped the Newspaper reorientate its disseminations.
Also in 1992, a book "Essentials for human life" was published by the newspaper in coordination with the Vietnam Women's Union. The book includes one chapter on AIDS disease and was distributed to the grass-root unions so that local women can easily access to the AIDS-related-information and knowledge. It is very glad for us that this book is reprinted and republished.

Up to now, Vietnam is at the 2nd phase of the national programme on AIDS Control and Prevention, and as previously mentioned, the AIDS-related deaths account for 34 cases in Vietnam. This trend requires better cooperation among mass media agencies to report and reflect in time all the situation of AIDS development.

Quite different from the first phase, the task of newspapers and press agencies at this phase is to provide readers with up-dated information of AIDS disease and live or real interviews arranged with HIV/AIDS patients so that communications between them with the society can be closely linked.

Because of typical socio-economic situation, the culture and tradition in Vietnam, the education and dissemination of AIDS control and prevention become more essential and the role that mass media plays is very imperative in the process of AIDS control and prevention in Vietnam.

*Hanoi, August - 1994*