

## Reviewer's report

**Title:** Empowering the people: Development of an HIV peer education model for low-literacy rural communities in India

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 20 August 2007

**Reviewer:** Charles Hoblitzelle

### Reviewer's report:

#### General

1) This is a well-written article that expands research in an important area: how to increase HIV awareness in low-literacy populations in rural areas. While the work was done in India, the findings are relevant to other low-resource countries facing the AIDS pandemic. The findings demonstrate the value of a peer education model, and the study methodology is clearly described, with enough information to encourage replication by others.

It is interesting that referrals identified 118 persons with HIV, since rough calculations ( $118/2,133$  referred) indicate an HIV prevalence of more than 5%. This is high for India (recently revised data from UNAIDS and India's National Family Health Survey III puts the overall prevalence in the adult population at .36%) and underscores the importance of reaching the rural population.

Even though the study showed the value of educating the rural population about HIV, it also indicates that there are limitations to this model. The authors make the important point that the individuals who were identified as HIV positive had to be transported (at project expense) a considerable distance to receive necessary medical care, and sustainability was an issue. While HIV education is a key component, access to medical services remains a critical challenge.

-----  
Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

NONE

-----  
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

2) The acronym PLHIV is misspelled on page 14 ("PLWHIV").

-----  
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

3) It would be useful to know more about the referral process, specifically, were people sent to private clinics where they had to pay for HIV testing, or were they sent to government sites? How accessible were the VCT services?

4) Three plus pages of the 20-page manuscript consist of excerpts from the focus groups and interviews. While interesting, it would tighten the article if these were edited down, or perhaps excerpted elsewhere in an annexure.

**What next?:** Accept after discretionary revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.