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HIV awareness in India: Using Wikipedia as a tool of societal awareness and transformation

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Statement of the Problem: India is home to the world's third-largest population suffering from HIV/AIDS after South Africa and Nigeria. This includes Commercial Sex Workers (CSW), Men having Sex with Men (MSM), Injecting Drug Users (IDU) and transgenders as the most vulnerable groups. India's National AIDS Awareness Control Organization (NACO) and State AIDS Control Societies (SACS) have been concurrently running awareness advertisements in the print media and commercials on the electronic media. However, in the current internet age, Wikipedia along with a host of other websites has emerged as a major source of information. With over 500 million surfers, internet users in India often seek knowledge through Wikipedia either directly or through Google-search. This study is a result of an awareness survey done by the presenter on HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) awareness and the use of Wikipedia in India.

Findings: The surveys find that Wikipedia is probably the most comfortable and handy tool for information. Although medical advice is needed in many complex cases, yet in a country like India where discussions pertinent to sex, birth control, marital problems and most importantly, the issues of HIV and venereal diseases are often viewed as taboo for open public discussion, this online resource largely suffices the void. There is a need to expand the knowledge levels in these areas of information in Indian languages on the lines of the English Wikipedia as many respondents are not well-versed in English.

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