

P2

## **Community Awareness Programs: An Essential Component of a Village-Based Intervention Program in Rural South India**

SusaiMahimaiJansi L<sup>2</sup>, Sankar Sahayaraj Muthukaruppan<sup>2</sup>, Aravind Bharathwaj<sup>2</sup>, Marie Brien<sup>1</sup>,  
Dinesh Krishna<sup>1</sup>, Ramasubramanian Ponnusamy<sup>2</sup>, Bala Murugan Poomariappan<sup>2</sup>, Sathiya  
Mariappan<sup>2</sup>, Sankara Raman Srinivasan<sup>2</sup>

1. Handi-Care International, Toronto, Canada

2. Amar Seva Sangam, Ayikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

**Introduction:** Community awareness programmes, targeted to all ages, gender, and levels of society are essential to disseminating knowledge, reducing stigma and changing attitudinal barriers towards people with disabilities in rural areas. Sensitization and educational programs promoting health and wellness, and community & school inclusion are achieved by strengthening the community understanding and support at large.

**Objectives:** The aims of this study were to: (1) establish and implement 3 types of rural community-based awareness programs: women awareness, community awareness and student awareness programs, and (2) evaluate participants change in knowledge and training effectiveness.

**Participants/Setting:** This program was developed by Amar Seva Sangam (ASSA), an Indian non-government organization in the District of Tirunelveli, State of Tamil Nadu in South India. For women awareness, participants included girls in grades 9-12, women of child-bearing age and expecting mothers, and conducted in village public places. School awareness programs were presented to students in grade 5 to 8 and teachers in the classroom setting. Community awareness programs were provided to adults of both genders and conducted in a village common place or workplace setting.

**Methods:** The 3 types of community awareness programs were developed and presented twice a week in different villages and settings. Community Awareness programs aimed at improving knowledge to dispel false beliefs and stigma about disabilities, the role of caregivers and family members of persons with disabilities and successfully creating gender-equality and greater inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Women Awareness Program were aimed at healthy practices during pregnancy, normal child development and early identification of delayed development. Student Awareness Program aimed at improving knowledge concerning healthy daily practices, promoting social inclusion and inclusive education programs for children with disabilities. Knowledge transmission and training effectiveness were measured through specific pre- and post-training questionnaires.

**Results:** From April 2017 to December 2019, a total of 113 awareness programs were conducted in 8 blocks of the Tirunelveli District. These were divided into 40 community awareness programs (12220 participants), 36 women awareness programs (10735 women) and 37 student

awareness programs (15314 students). Pre- and post-tests completed by each awareness program participant showed that all of 38269 participants had improved awareness on child development, disability and health & well-being. The overall social impact will be measured at the end of three years.

**Conclusions:** Targeted community-based awareness programs form an integral part of a village-based intervention program by improving knowledge and understanding about health and disability, empowering and dispelling myths to achieve a healthy and inclusive society and schooling system.