

National AIDS Control Organization
presents

AA MUSKURAA
(Come, Smile...)

120 minutes, Hindi

*A 2-hour long training film for imparting
communication counseling skills to ICTC counselors*

Screenplay & Direction: Sridhar Rangayan

OUTLINE

A young counsellor, Priya, has a daunting task as she joins an ICTC clinic at a government hospital in a small town. Priya has a handful of new challenges everyday as she is needed to learn new techniques and skills to face up to the problems posed by her counsellees. Using a narrative format with real life incidents & experiences, and building it up with humour & drama, this training film 'Aa Muskuraa' imparts counselling skills to young ICTC counsellors to guide them on their journey towards becoming competent counsellors of tomorrow.

BACKGROUND

HIV counselling and testing services are a key entry point to prevention of HIV infection, and to treatment and care of people who are infected with HIV. When availing counselling and testing services, people can access accurate information about HIV prevention and care, and undergo an HIV test in a supportive and confidential environment.

People who are found HIV-negative are supported with information and counselling to reduce risks and remain HIV-negative. People who are found HIV-positive are provided psychosocial support and referred for treatment and care.

As of today, only 25—% of the people who are HIV positive in the country are aware of their HIV status. The challenge is to make all HIV-infected people in the country aware of their status so that they adopt healthy lifestyles and prevent the transmission of HIV to others, and access life-saving care and treatment.

Thus, considering that counselling and testing services are an important component of prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in the country, it is imperative that counsellors at Integrated Counselling and testing Centers (ICTCs) are able to effectively counsel and communicate with their clients in order to provide them with vital information as well as psycho-social support.

NEED FOR FILM

A training film on Counseling Skills was needed to build the capacity of counselors in communication and counseling and help them learn the appropriate techniques needed for interacting effectively with their clients. It was intended that the film will orient them on the principles of interpersonal communication and also build their skills around other issues which directly or indirectly affect their interaction with clients.

The film would be used by NACO for the training of ICTC counselors across the country. Some of the issues that needed to be covered through the film & training manual were:

1. Basics of counselling / interpersonal communication
2. Removing inhibitions in talking about sexual health
3. Self esteem / self confidence
4. Motivation
5. Dealing with aggressive / hostile clients
6. Dealing with frustration / stress /burn-out
7. Assertiveness
8. Dealing with problems
9. Group communication
10. Using communication materials effectively
11. Behavior Change Communication concepts and their applications

PROCESS OF MAKING THE FILM

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs (JHU.CCP), which has provided technical assistance on various aspects of Behaviour Change Communication to the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), has developed a campaign to raise awareness and generate demand for services available at the Integrated Counselling and Testing Centers (ICTCs). While on the demand side a mass media campaign was developed, on the supply side a training film was needed to strengthen the Interpersonal Communication / Counselling (IPC/C) skills of the ICTC counsellors so the client-provider interaction is more effective.

JHU.CCP selected The Humsafar Trust (HST) to produce the film as HST had a good track record of producing effective films on HIV/AIDS, like the film '68 Pages' which portrayed the life of a counsellor.

Some of the key steps in the film development process were:

- Identification of Target audience: Counsellors working at government run ICTCs.
- Development of Script: An entertainment-education (EE) approach was adopted for the development of the narrative structure. So, the script was in the form of a story which included humour and drama along with specific skills building objectives so that the film would be engaging as well as informative. It was decided that the film would be set in a small town and focus on a young counselor who has just passed her/his Masters in Social Work (MSW) course.
- Research: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with a Script Advisory Team that included counsellors —both young and experienced —from several agencies in Mumbai, like FPAI, MDACS, Nair Hospital, MS Desai Hospital, The Humsafar Trust, etc. to identify the key

areas to focus in the story. These consultations helped to draw out the issues faced by counsellors with regard to their communication skills. FGD were also conducted with members of high risk behavior groups like commercial sex workers and intravenous drug users, men who have sex with men and transgendered people to understand the issues and challenges they face when they go for counselling to an ICTC.

- The script was developed by the creative team put together by The Humsafar Trust, with continuous inputs provided by JHU.CCP and NACO at every stage of writing from the concept and story to screenplay and dialogues.

- The script along with dialogues was read out and discussed at length at two more FGDs with the script advisory team and the community consultants who gave both positive feedback and critical comments for improvement. The script was also sent to Lakshya Trust, Vadodara where a team of community counsellors reviewed and provided their comments to the script.

- The script was shared with counsellors of West Bengal during the course of a training programme.

- Key actors for the film were inducted through open auditions and several meetings. Community members were auditioned for the role of the transgender person in the film, because it was decided to work with a real life transgender person. After selection and approval of actors, an intensive workshop spread over several weeks was conducted to make the actors sensitive to issues in the film and further understand the needs of their characters. The actor who plays the lead role of the ICTC counselor was taken for an exposure visit to an ICTC and was put through mock counseling sessions with a real life counselor as well as one-on-one meeting and mentoring by counselors to prepare her for the extremely challenging role.

- The lead actor also had to learn, from a peer counselor, the process of condom demonstration.

- The technical crew —cameraman, art director, sound recordist, production person were also taken for several on-site visits at various ICTCs to familiarize them with the surroundings, infrastructure and functioning of the ICTCs.

- The effort was to make the film mirror reality as closely as possible and ensure everything was factually correctly represented.

- During the entire shooting process, a real counselor was present everyday to ensure correct portrayal of process and procedure and also to assist the actors with necessary details.

- The rough cut was shared with all concerned to receive inputs. The counselors, who were earlier part of the FGDs, were also invited to see the film and give their feedback and suggestions.

- The final film incorporates all the suggestions and modifications were made

- The final film is about 2 hours long, divided into 18 chapters, each of which detail a particular aspect of imparting counselling skills to counselors.

WAYS TO USE THE FILM

1. Trainers can use the film as a teaser before their topic is covered through the training session. They can note questions/ observations from trainees on a flip chart and ensure that the questions are answered through the course of the session, while commenting on the validity of the observations from the trainees.
2. Trainers can cover the content first and then use the film to wrap up the session.
3. For refresher training, the film clips can be used to revise the basic information. Trainers can also ask counsellors to assess themselves against what is shown in the film. Discussion can centre around how easy or difficult it is to practise what is shown in the film. In case counsellors cite time as a reason trainers can point out the actual amount of time taken in the film for the relevant dialogues and bring the discussion back to effective use of counselling skills.
4. When screening an isolated film clip, introduce the back drop to the scene (such as characters, problem) without going into details about how the characters are going to act.
5. Some cases are ongoing. By linking up the various scenes such as Rupa A, Rupa B, Rupa C, etc. trainers can discuss the progression in the counselling skills.

STORY

A young counsellor, Priya, has a daunting task as she joins an ICTC clinic at a government hospital in a small town. Can she counsel clients effectively by using what she has learnt in college or does she need new techniques and skills to face up to the challenges posed by her clients everyday ranging from Jitta, a truck driver who is her fathers' age with whom she has to discuss sexual history; Rupa, a young sex worker from the North East of India who is so devastated after she comes to know she is HIV positive that she doesn't speak a word to anyone; Ponnamma, a pregnant illiterate woman who can only speak Tamil; Kuppan, Ponnamma's husband who is a drug user; and Salma, a frank outspoken transgender who makes no secret of her sexuality.

Will Priya be able to overcome her own self doubts, insecurities, taboos and biases to rise up to the challenges or will she succumb to the burn-out syndrome? Guiding her along the way is a helpful District Supervisor, while her sister, mother and co-worker provide moral support. But it is finally Priya herself who has to travel the journey of discoveries & learnings and build her own competencies.

Using a narrative format with real life incidents & experiences woven in and building in humour & drama, this training film 'Aa Muskuraa' which means 'Come, Smile' imparts counselling skills to young ICTC counsellors to guide them on their journey towards becoming competent counsellors of tomorrow.

CREDITS

Principal Cast:

Priya: Namrata Kadam; *Dr Vidya:* Mona Ambegaonkar;
Jitta: Rajeev Mishra; *Shabnam:* Neela Gokhale; *Roopa:* Sonal Giani; *Ponnamma:* Amita Ailawadi; *Kuppan:* Firoz Sayed; *Hitesh:* Sachin Shirke; *Salim/Salma:* Shalu; *Mangesh:* Akshay Nalwade; *Navin:* Sukant Goel; *Aai:* Mangala Aher; *Sandhya:* Ateet Bhandari; *Babu:* Nimesh Mehta; *Dr Joshi:* Pramathesh Mehta; *Usha:* Usha Anderwar

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Produced by:

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health,
Center for Communication Programs (JHU.CCP)

Story, Screenplay & Direction:

Sridhar Rangayan

Executive Producer: Dr. Sanjanthi Velu (JHU.CCP)

Line Production: Vivek Anand (The Humsafar Trust)

Dialogues: Saagar Gupta; *Editor:* Pravin Angre; *Music:* Suresh Iyer

Director Of Photography: Subhransu Das

Script Research and Inputs: Dr. Suresh Mohamed, DAC

Dr. Melita Vaz, DAC, Sumita Chalil, DAC, Mayank Agarwal, DAC

Dr Raghuram Rao, DAC, Dr. Avinash Kanchar, DAC, Prachi Garg, DAC, Rajesh Rana, DAC,

Dr. Sanjanthi Velu, JHU.CCP, Rudrajit Das, JHU.CCP, Uttara Bharath, JHU.CCP