

Protocol of Panel Session C

“Effective methods in HIV/STI prevention and integrative approaches to sexual health”

Moderation: Kathrin Bever (Germany, MAT LAKOST)

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Kathrin Bever opens the plenary session with a short input-presentation, which combines and defines the key terms of the workshop’s title: “sexual health”, “integrative approaches” and “effective methods”.

According to the moderator, the promotion of **“sexual health”** is based on continuity, a holistic approach and liveliness. It aims that the individual feels comfortable with his life and is satisfied and balanced. To achieve this one has to learn to protect oneself from the risks related to sexual transmitted infections (STI). This means one must act self-determinedly and self-responsibly, which, in turn, presupposes a strong personality and sufficient information/education.

Kathrin Bever notes that in order to promote sexual health one needs **integrative approaches**. To her this means, first, that it would be useful to operate with different professions, which learn together and mutually from each other and exchange their experience in a cross-border context with the objective of collaborating effectively in the field of prevention. Second, her position advocates integrating socially disadvantaged people that are less likely to be provided with essential information and have much greater demand for assistance. Third, “integrative” means to her that methods of STI prevention are only then effective, i.e. encourage contemplation and thus have a positive impact on attitude and influence behaviour in a sustainable way, when they are continuously embedded into sexual education. Kathrin Bever remarks that good experiences could be made in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, but due to different cultural background and religious beliefs, this cannot always be implemented in other countries and border regions as in Zachodniopomorskie (PL). In order to succeed in one’s work though, she concludes, it is of crucial importance to respect, to accept and to tolerate them.

However, Kathrin Bever points out that sexual education is also social education. Therefore, there is already an integrative potential – an interconnectedness of different subject areas in social life. In her view, not only schools, youth institutions and counselling centres, but also media and (gynaecological) medical practice that are capable of counselling and educating, share the responsibility (of prevention and promotion of sexual health). She gives two examples which can be recommended: first a consultation-hour for girls and the offer of early-diagnosis-screening of Chlamydia-Trachomatis infections for adolescents.

Kathrin Bever proceeds with the definition of the key terms **“effective methods”** by asking how one could live up to the objectives, what has been achieved, where there have been limits and obstacles, wherein lie potentials for some kind of action and where should one go on with intervention.

To answer these questions, she looks at her own work in the Model Region I (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern / Zachodniopomorskie) and points accordingly out examples.

Based on the KAB survey that was carried out in all Model Regions, adolescents have relatively high basic knowledge about HIV/STIs, but are often uncertain when it comes to the details, which is due to their age. This is why they are in need of professional support. One implemented pilot action is the “Youth Film Days” (Jugendfilmtage), which are supported by the “Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung” (BzgA). The Youth Film Days provide the advantage that a large number of adolescents can be reached. The adolescents are motivated to take part, communicate and try things out in manifold actions. The effects of the films themselves are enacted later, since they should be discussed in school class. To do this in the most effect way, workshops are offered which provide the teachers with suggestions, information and didactic ideas in order to motivate and to supply the adolescents with prevention and safety messages.

Besides the Youth Film Days, numerous workshops for adolescents have been carried out. They have been conducted in Mecklenburg Vorpommern mainly in schools; in Zachodniopomorskie, mainly outside of school settings (i.e. in youth institutions) in order to avoid confrontation and resistance from the still more traditional school setting in Poland and, instead, to enable prevention.

Furthermore, a poster competition was arranged to encourage addressing the topic of HIV/STI in an artistic way. This was implemented in a school setting and it activated conversations between students and teachers. As a result, numerous workshops evolved. On the 1st of December (WAD), the winners were awarded a price. All in all, the poster competition was better accepted on the Polish than on the German side.

Kathrin Bever concludes that the two important prevention messages for adolescents are: First, take responsibility for your own actions, and second, protect yourself from HIV/STIs by using condoms.

Another target group the Model Region I decided to focus on in a meeting was HIV-positive men, which serves as a good example of the difficulties and obstacles one is faced with in the field of prevention. By means of interviews that were carried in local AIDS organisations, the actors of the Model Region wanted to find out more about this group in order to develop concrete prevention measurements. It showed that numerous HIV-positive men were reluctant to take part in the survey and participants from Poland were underrepresented. External access to this group remains difficult. These difficulties were not foreseen by the Model Region partners, and thus consecutive measures following the pilot survey were not undertaken and were instead abandoned.

Prevention measures in Model Region I targeted not only teachers but also students and social workers in workshops. The aim was to provide them with prevention methods and basic communication skills. According to a survey, the most important issues for the teachers is to acquire methods and techniques, to obtain specific knowledge how to work in groups. The most important prevention messages for this target group are: First, have the courage to talk with adolescents; second, be authentic, trustworthy, and empathetic; and, third, recognize that the sexual health of adolescents is your responsibility too.

Due to the fact that doctors can contribute greatly to prevention, they were also targeted in workshops. Experience shows though, that they can hardly be motivated to participate in prevention and one has to “lure” them with certificates that are acknowledged by the medical association or similar institutions. According to Kathrin Bever, in the future there will be a

high potential to collaborate with associations from different fields in order to emphasize to them the crucial role they play in prevention and in bringing together the different professions, such as doctors, consultants and pedagogues. The most important prevention messages for the doctors are: First, participate actively in prevention; second, have conversations with your patients about HIV/STI; and third, work with people, and thus take personal responsibility for patients' health as well.

Kathrin Bever then passes on the word to the contributors by asking the contributors to detail their best-practice prevention measures and the target group on which it focused.

Joanna Dec (Zielona Gora, Model Region II, Poland) responds, explaining how sexual education has become mandatory for university students in the field of social sciences and pedagogic who will work as consultants later. Students can choose from several courses such as "introduction into sexual education" or "prevention", which, nevertheless, relate and belong to each other.

Furthermore students have founded an association that aims at developing different methods and, generally, at deepening knowledge in prevention. The association works without the help of professors but is supervised. The members contributed in organising the "Youth Film Days" and collected data for the research that was carried out in the framework of BORDERNET.

Miran Solinc (NGO SKUC-Magnus, Model Region IV, Slovenia) reports that their best-practice prevention measure was the compilation and distribution of a practical guide for MSM (Men that have sex with men). The guide was produced in collaboration with different professionals such as proctologist specialists and several state institutions and includes descriptions of sexual practices and information concerning HIV VCT (Voluntary Counselling and Testing). It is available in different languages. Another achievement is the offering of Hepatitis A and B vaccination for MSM free of charge.

Frank Amort (AIDS-Hilfe Wien, Model Region III, Austria) indicates that numerous measures have been undertaken with outcomes remaining still uncertain. However, while implementing them, the Austrian Aids Hilfe oriented itself and put into action the results of the Bordernet-surveys.

For instance the MSM-KAB (Knowledge, Attitude, Behaviour)-survey showed that MSM feel highly threatened and frightened by HIV/AIDS. Thus a campaign was initiated that did not mention the word AIDS, but has, instead, presented the contrary connotation of fear (slogan: "Lust auf Leben, Lust auf Schwulsein" = "desire for life, desire for being gay"). Furthermore the images were quite "Austrian" by being in baroque-style and extravagant. The campaign was launched in the whole of Austria and was placed on the internet (due to the relatively low prices) and on give-aways such as condoms and calendars. However, in order to implement this MSM-campaign, the entire annual advertising budget had to be used, leaving the other target groups with nothing of the official state money. In spite of that, Frank Amort stresses the facts that new prevention messages were needed for MSM, and that this group has nearly no access to state resources or private sponsors.

Sabine Kaschubowski (AIDS-Hilfe Potsdam, Model Region II, Germany) states that many integrative pilot projects were launched in the framework of Bordernet. Despite the fact that the Aidshilfe Potsdam has (with merely two employees) insufficient staff, a large federal province-based initiative "Brandenburg – gemeinsam gegen Aids" has been founded and annually coordinated. Sabine Kaschubowski points out that one of the members is the Brandenburg's Ministry for Health and Labour Affairs, which is of high importance, since the

decision-makers are involved in the prevention implementation. The reduction of the number of new HIV-infections in Brandenburg is still one of the major health aims, and there are different objectives for each target groups.

MSM have been greatly neglected so far, but owing to Bordernet first priorities for situation analysis have been set at least. The finding of new cooperation partners in the gay community has been difficult due to the reluctance of the community to be associated with the HIV/AIDS issue. However, after hard work of convincing new partners could be found and they are linked to the website now. Additionally, a Hepatitis-flyer was produced and distributed for this target group. Migrants constitute about 40% of all HIV/AIDS-affected people in Brandenburg, and several medias were developed in response, focusing though not only on HIV but also on STIs. For instance, a guide in five different languages has been produced for this target group that explains the health system of Germany and Brandenburg. The guide is distributed by means of the existing network of cultural mediators. Sabine Kaschubowski points out that the Aidshilfe is also responsible for counselling and taking care of people who live with HIV infection and/or AIDS. According to her, secondary prevention is in need of improvement.

At last Kathrin Bever raises the question of where things stand after the end of the Bordernet-project.

Sabine Kaschubowski responds that the work will continue with a particular focus on adolescents since the KAB-survey showed deficits among them. She expresses her profound wish to go on with the cross-border collaboration.

Joanna Dec replies to the question that they will also focus on youth and will continue the German-Polish collaboration in that respect (for instance, at the Woodstock-Festival). Furthermore the cross-border cooperation will continue in the field of steer work among Polish and other East European prostitutes in the border area between Poland and Germany.

Miran Solinc states that the Middle-European internet-prevention will be extended towards South-East Europe. Thus the network will definitely further exist.

Frank Amort emphasises the importance of keeping the contacts despite the non-continuation of the project but is optimistic about it. He suggests a cross-border MSM-campaign.

Kathrin Bever express appreciation for the contribution of the panel speakers and invites the audience to state questions.