
HIV/AIDS Vulnerability
in Most at Risk Populations in Sylhet City
Bangladesh

**A thesis submitted to the Swiss Tropical Institute, University of
Basel, in partial fulfilment of the tropEd Masters Programme in
International Health**

Peter Friedrich Maria Ternes

Basel, October 2009

1 Executive summary

Bangladesh is still assessed a low prevalence country for HIV/AIDS with the potential of a rapid spread of the disease as the infection rate is rising rapidly among IDU, implicating the danger of an IDU-driven epidemic as it is seen in neighboring countries. Behavioral risk factors and a high prevalence of STI that facilitate the transmission of HIV may contribute to this development. Prior projects of research or cooperation on this topic were mainly emphasizing on the national level and on nationwide programs by national and foreign institutions or they focused on single risk groups and communities.

The Rapid Vulnerability Assessment that is subject of this dissertation was conducted between 6th April and 2nd June 2008 in Sylhet City in the north east of Bangladesh, to raise quantitative and qualitative data on HIV/AIDS among most at risk populations (MARPs). It is part of the Multidisciplinary HIV/AIDS Program in Sylhet City, being a systematic city-specific multisectoral approach of research at the municipal level with the aim to assist local authorities in their interventions against HIV/AIDS. A total of 2706 respondents of 14 MARPs including FSW, MSW, Hijras, MSM, drug users, transport workers and students were interviewed. The objectives of the study targeted on the assessment of knowledge on HIV/AIDS, on sexual behavior and condom use, mobility, drug abuse and other risk factors among MARPs. Prevalence of STI symptoms, health seeking behavior, already existing intervention programs and evidence on the size of the single MARPs were investigated.

Results show large gaps in the knowledge on transmission modes including sharing of injecting equipment, which was found to be common among IDU, and only a marginal perception of the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Consistent condom use was low to very low among all MARPs. Current prevalence of STI symptoms among sex workers, Hijras and MSM was high and large numbers of members of HRG did not attend professional treatment facilities. Preventive activities against STI/HIV were found highly insufficient and HIV testing was almost inexistent besides among MSW and Hijras. Vulnerability of MARPs for HIV/AIDS and the danger of a rapid spread of the infection among HRG and from HRG to the general population in Sylhet if the epidemic threshold is reached must be assessed as high.