

FHI FOCUS ON Philippines

Background

Just over 1,500 new cases of HIV/AIDS, most involving sexual transmission, have been reported since January 1984. Surveillance data indicates that prevalence rates are low even among the most vulnerable groups. Awareness of ways to prevent HIV transmission remains high, but has not been translated to behavior change.

Less than half of the at-risk population groups report consistent condom usage. Injecting drug use among some deep sea fishermen and freelance sex workers in General Santos City was unexpectedly high.

Ad hoc surveys reveal that rates of sexually transmitted infection (STI) remain high. Estimates of STI prevalence in the Philippines are as follows:

STI	High Risk (%)	Low Risk (%)
Neisseria gonorrhoea	5	1
Chlamydia trachomatis	35	15
Treponema Pallidum	3.5	1.5
Trichomonas vaginalis	9	3

Strategy

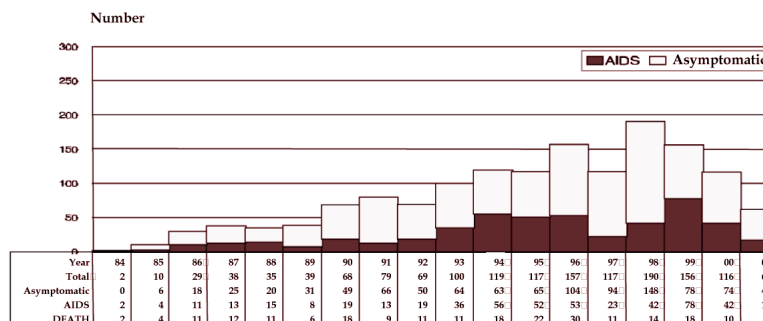
FHI/IMPACT, and its partners PATH (Program for Appropriate Technology in Health) and FETP (Field Epidemiology and Training Program), are working to accomplish USAID/Philippines's special objective to prevent the rapid increase of HIV/AIDS. PATH is implementing the education component while FETP is conducting the HIV/Behavioral surveillance. FHI IMPACT is concentrating on reducing the prevalence of common STI and improving surveillance efforts. Current efforts include: conducting a validation study of STI syndromic case management and supporting a model STI intervention for local governments to use to improve STI prevention and care. IMPACT is also assisting the Department of Health in establishing the National STI Surveillance System and conducting a survey of male sexual risk behavior.

Program Accomplishments

FHI/IMPACT has:

- Improved the diagnostic validity of the National STI Case Management guidelines to address treatment concerns and ensure optimal use of resources and drug supplies. Improved risk assessment tools and modified flowchart for vaginal discharge based on phase one study results. The modified STI Case Management flowcharts are now being evaluated to improve its diagnostic performance.
- Implemented on-the-spot syphilis screening and treatment of risk groups in Angeles City. Screened over 2,445 high-risk individuals, of which 5% were reactive and treated for syphilis. Through a strategy of NGO/GO collaboration and education, syphilis screening and treatment can effectively reach asymptomatic syphilis.

HIV Ab Seropositives: HIV/AIDS Registry, January-May 2001 (N = 1,503)



- Strengthened government's and NGO's STI control efforts in Angeles City, that can provide a model for communities with high rates of curable STI and risk behavior. A single round of presumptive treatment with Azithromycin to 2,000 female sex workers achieved a rapid reduction of gonococcal and chlamydial infection. To maintain reduced STI prevalence levels, sustainable and curative services are being strengthened.
- Conducted a population-based survey of male sexual risk behavior as part of second-generation surveillance activities. The information gleaned about contact between the general population and high-risk groups substantiates findings of previous sentinel surveillance.
- We are supporting the National AIDS/STI program to establish STI surveillance for a more rational response to STI. The National Strategy and STI guidelines (including pretesting) has been developed.

Despite some progress, ensuring correct knowledge and eliciting positive responses to HIV/AIDS prevention will require more work.

The Challenges

- The major challenge that confronts the Philippines is keeping HIV prevalence low. In the face of a low epidemic, advocating for more support in order to sustain and expand current initiatives and develop new initiatives appropriate to keep the HIV low is an uphill battle.
- There is a need to expand targeted interventions with sex workers, men who have sex with men, drug users and other high risk groups such as fishermen and overseas contract workers.
- Adequate strategies are in place, but implementation has so far been limited to a few pilot sites targeting only some high risk groups. There is a need to scale up comprehensive responses.
- Increasing the scope of STI care beyond the small group of registered sex workers is urgently needed.

Future Program Priorities

FHI will:

- Promote effective and sustainable interventions by creating an enabling environment;
- Enhance understanding of HIV epidemic, risk behaviors, and determinants affecting vulnerability to infection;
- Demonstrate effectiveness of pilot projects to decrease STI/HIV infections; and
- Expand effective interventions to change behavior, improve STI services and increase the use of condoms.

Partner Agencies:

PATH
 Department of Health
 University of the Philippines, College of Public Health
 Field Epidemiology Training Program Alumni Foundation
 De La Salle University, Behavioral Sciences Department

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