

TAJIKISTAN

DHAPP

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HIV/AIDS
PREVENTION PROGRAM

REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF HIV/AIDS
AMONG UNIFORMED PERSONNEL IN
SELECTED AFRICAN NATIONS AND BEYOND

WINNING BATTLES IN THE WAR AGAINST HIV/AIDS

BACKGROUND

Country Statistics

Tajikistan became independent in 1991 following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and it is now in the process of strengthening its democracy and transitioning to a free market economy after a civil war that lasted from 1992 to 1997. The population of Tajikistan is estimated to be 7.3 million people, with an average life expectancy of 64.9 years. Tajik is the official language of Tajikistan, which has an estimated literacy rate of 99.4%, evenly distributed between men and women. The gross domestic product per capita is \$1,200, with 64% of Tajikistan's people living below the poverty line.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in Tajikistan's general population is estimated at 0.10%. There are 454 registered cases of HIV, although the number is thought to be higher. Of these, more than 60% are men, over 70% are intravenous drug users, and more than 70% are younger than 30 years old.

Of note, antiretroviral therapy (ART) has recently begun in Tajikistan. Twenty HIV-infected persons were selected nearly a year ago to undergo ART. Due to a variety of attrition factors, 15 are currently undergoing ART in northern Tajikistan. According to the Sughd AIDS-Prevention Center, 211 HIV sufferers, including 49 women, have to date been officially reported in northern Tajikistan.

Military Statistics

The size of Tajikistan Armed Forces (TAF) is approximately 27,000, including the Border Guards, the largest branch of the TAF, comprising about 12,500 officers and enlisted members. In addition, the Ministry of Defense has about 10,500 personnel, the National Guard has 2,500, the Ministry of Emergency Situations and Civil Defense has about 1500 members. No information regarding HIV prevalence in the military is available, but the military is generally considered a high-risk group. Informal reports indicate that military personnel while on leave or vacation regularly have sexual contact with commercial sex workers and the local population.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

DHAPP staff members have maintained close collaborative contact with US Office of Defense Cooperation personnel in Tajikistan. Together, funding allocated for fiscal year 2006 was used to ensure the commencement of a successful program for the TAF particularly for National Guard personnel.

During FY06, 10 members of National Guard medical staff were trained to provide HIV prevention messages. They, in turn, trained 10 officer and enlisted personnel peer educators, who will provide information to military personnel in all National Guard detachments, ensuring reach to 1000 people. During program implementation, educational materials were collected, booklets in Russian and Tajik languages were designed and published, and collaboration was established with other organizations involved with HIV/AIDS issues in the Republic. For instance, personnel from the Central Military Hospital were actively engaged in training master trainers in the National Guard. Specialists from the Ministry of Health and AIDS Prevention Center were invited for design of educational and training materials. Eighteen thousand (18,000) condoms were provided and will be distributed.

Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal from the TAF for FY07 funding. The stated goal of the proposed HIV/AIDS program in Tajikistan is to build on the established programs in the Ministry of Defense, Border Guards, and National Guard, and extend participation to the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the final branch of Tajikistan's armed forces. The program plans to continue to train medical staff, enhance peer education programs, broaden the voluntary testing program, and implement the TAF policy on HIV/AIDS, which was developed and approved in 2005. Treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as improvement of laboratory supplies, equipment, and infrastructure for medical testing and treatment will also be undertaken.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Prevention, Care and Treatment

The HIV prevention program in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Tajikistan is relatively new, with official indicators only recently collected. During the final quarter of FY06, 746 troops were reached with comprehensive prevention messages, and another 100 personnel trained in the provision of these messages.

The Office of Defense Cooperation at the US Embassy and colleagues in the military believe that FY06 efforts at prevention through educational activities have positively influenced the level of education of military personnel that participated. DHAPP staff members look forward to continued success in these programs, which have already created new levels of awareness of HIV/AIDS, as well as STIs and drug addiction, in Tajikistan.