



THAILAND

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

The population of Thailand is estimated to be 64.6 million people, with an average life expectancy of 72.2 years. Thai is the official language of Thailand, which has an estimated literacy rate of 92.6%, evenly distributed between men and women. Boosted by increased consumption and strong export growth, the Thai economy grew 6.9% in 2003 and 6.1% in 2004 despite a sluggish global economy. Bangkok has pursued preferential trade agreements with a variety of partners in an effort to boost exports and to maintain high growth. In late December 2004, a major tsunami took 8500 lives in Thailand and caused massive destruction of property. Growth slowed to 4.4% in 2005. In 2006, the economy benefited from an influx of investment and a revived tourism sector. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$8,600, with 10% of Thai people living below the poverty level. Thailand is currently facing armed violence in its three Muslim-majority southernmost provinces.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in Thailand's general population is estimated at 1.4%, with approximately 580,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS. It is believed that heterosexual intercourse still accounts for the majority of new infections.

Military Statistics

The Royal Thai Army (RTA) consists of approximately 300,000 active-duty members. Thailand expends 1.8% of its GDP for military purposes. Military HIV prevalence rates are unknown. A rapid assessment conducted by the Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences (AFRIMS) and Family Health International (FHI) in 2003 concluded that there are significant risk factors among military personnel in Kanchanaburi Province, including: inappropriate self-treatment for sexual health concerns; sexual networks of military men shifting from direct sex workers to indirect sex workers, low condom use, barriers to condom use, and concerns about privacy and confidentiality related to health care services in the army hospital. These factors put military personnel at a higher risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

Since 2003, the US Pacific Command (USPACOM) and its implementing agent, the Center of Excellence (COE), have utilized a strategy of leveraging its established working relations with military partners and civilian experts to catalyze regional cooperation on HIV/AIDS issues. To accomplish this, a partnership with the RTA continues to be essential to enabling a

“neighbors teaching neighbors” approach. USPACOM/COE together with AFRIMS, stood up a military Regional Training Center responsible for education of a core group of military medical officers. These officers form a nidus of their respective country’s military HIV/AIDS prevention efforts and serve as liaisons and advocates for future work.

Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal for FY07 activities from FHI in collaboration with AFRIMS on behalf of the RTA. The objectives of the proposal included increase awareness of HIV and STI transmission and prevention interventions by military personnel and allied communities of Kanchanaburi Province, strengthen capacity of counseling and testing (CT) service providers and increase demand for CT services, strengthen referral linkages and systems between the military hospital and other health care centers, and ensure sustainable activities and systems by working with local counterparts. Specific goals included reaching 1000 commissioned officers, noncommissioned officers, and conscripts reached by peer leaders through workshops and HIV/AIDS and STI information, and CT services provided to 15,000 new military recruits from RTA hospitals throughout Thailand.

The proposal was reviewed by a scientific panel and will be submitted to the DHAPP Board of Directors.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Prevention and Care

Twenty (20) medical military personnel from 10 countries attended the *RTC HIV/AIDS Laboratory and Diagnostics Workshop* in Bangkok. Twenty-seven (27) medical military personnel from 17 countries attended the *RTC HIV/AIDS Care & Treatment Workshop*, including site visits to local HIV treatment facilities in Bangkok.

