



Viet Nam: Targeting Young Women in HIV/AIDS Prevention - 2007

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Young women are more vulnerable to HIV and are at a higher risk of infection due to biological and socio-cultural factors. Social structures and cultural values that support and, to some extent, promote traditional gender relations exacerbate women's susceptibility to the virus. Women's economic and social disempowerment means they are more likely to be involved in sex work and unable to protect themselves from infection. Recognizing the different risks, behaviors and socio-cultural situations of men and women in relation to HIV/AIDS is critical for understanding the epidemic and mounting an effective response.

In Viet Nam, an increasing number of young women migrate from the rural to urban areas in search of employment opportunities in the growing industry and service sectors. Most lack the knowledge, information and means with which to protect themselves from possible exploitation (economic and sexual) and HIV infection. Social isolation and lack of access to services increases these risks. In some instances, poverty and the lack of economic opportunities drive young women into the sex trade. The sex-entertainment industry including clubs, karaoke and beer bars are expanding rapidly creating income options for women while simultaneously increasing their risk of contracting HIV. The behaviors and risks faced by young men and young women are the driving forces of the epidemic.

Through a \$20 million grant to the Government of Viet Nam, ADB is supporting behavior change among youth (aged 15-24) to address the spread of HIV/AIDS. Recognizing that HIV/AIDS prevention and transmission has important gender dimensions, a gender strategy was prepared and is included in the project design to specifically address young women's vulnerability and risk towards HIV transmission. Acknowledging and addressing the fact that risks, including risk behaviors, and protective factors differ according to gender will be a critical feature of all aspects of Project activities. It will be particularly important in the mass media component which will aim to address the gender norms that affect HIV risk through social messaging and role model behaviors. The strategy emphasizes the importance of gender norms, interpersonal relationships, gender power dynamics, knowledge and information empowerment, and social expectations that affect both young men and young women's risk to HIV infection.

The gender strategy guides project activities in the areas of (i) leadership and strategic support for HIV/AIDS prevention among youth, (ii) a national mass media program for behavior change, and establishing community-based HIV/AIDS prevention resources for youth (e.g., harm reduction outreach services, HIV prevention for vulnerable youth, and primary prevention programs for youth and families). Some specific gender actions include:

- Strengthening the capacity of leaders; developing information packages will be developed with modules on female youth, their vulnerabilities and risk behaviors related to HIV/AIDS.
- Designing a national mass media program, especially the television dramas to focus on (a) the particular HIV/AIDS risks and vulnerabilities faced by young women, and (b) the positive roles that young women hold in society.
- Providing harm-reduction services in locations with high access for, and at times conducive to, young women. Services to be provided in anonymous and confidential settings, especially for young women. Referrals will also be provided to family planning and reproductive health services as well as to counseling, treatment, and care.

The gender strategy also features a review of provincial action plans during implementation to include a gender analysis and a gender action plan based on the gender strategy. Gender focal points within the project management units will ensure that recommended mechanisms for monitoring targets and evaluating project outcome are realized.

Related

- [38581-022: HIV/AIDS Prevention Among Youth](#)
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