

Launching of OKUP-UNDP HIV Study Report

On November 24, OKUP in collaboration with UNDP launched its study report entitled **“HIV vulnerabilities faced by women migrants: from Bangladesh to the Arab States”**. OKUP conducted this country research which was a part of the regional study jointly undertaken by UNDP regional HIV and Development Programme and CARAM Asia, Caritas Lebanon and other UN development partners in October 2007.



The Honorable Minister, Eng. Khondokar Musarrif Hossain, the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Welfare attended and launched the study as chief guest. Secretary in charge of the same ministry, Mr. Elias Ahmed, UNDP country director Mr. Stefan Priesner, UNAIDS country coordinator Mr. Salil Panakadan spoke in the function as special guests. Shakirul Islam, the chief researcher and the Chairman of OKUP, presented the key research findings of the country report while Ms. Caitlin Wiesen, Regional HIV/AIDS

Practice Leader and Programme Coordinator Asia & Pacific UNDP Regional Centre, shared the regional analysis of findings of the report.

“Many migrant workers around the world are subject to exploitation and mistreatment, and that is a worldwide problem that we are very concerned about.” says Engr. Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, Honourable Minister for Labour, Employment, Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment “Host countries and countries of origin have an equal responsibility to provide protective policies and programmes. However, progress is being made and there is more dialogue between origin and host countries which is helping us ensure that migrant’ rights are respected and protected while they are abroad.” In his speech, the Minister also said **“the study report is an eye-opener and the matter will have to be looked into seriously as it’s a problem”**

“The economic gains generated by migrant workers are enormous, reaching almost 9.4 % of GDP in Bangladesh in 2007” said Stefan Priesner, UNDP Country Director. “It is therefore critical that good working conditions and support are provided to migrant workers throughout the migration cycle” he added.

“Although migration itself is not a risk factor to HIV infection, the conditions under which some workers migrate and their living conditions in the host countries make them highly vulnerable to HIV” says Dr. Salil Panakadan UNAIDS Country Coordinator “In many cases, HIV testing in both countries of origin and host countries breaches migrants’ rights – testing is undertaken without consent, counseling, confidentiality or support,” he says.



The report revealed that 85% of women migrants particularly domestic workers are faced physical abused and 20% of them are abused sexually in their workplaces. Duress in the workplace, sexual exploitation, lack of legal coverage, and limited or no access to proper information, health and social services contribute to increase HIV vulnerabilities of women migrants. The poor women migrant workers ultimately lose their jobs and are deported without any support services and counseling when they are found HIV-infected in the mandatory testing. The study also disclosed that only nine percent of women workers received pre-departure training. Therefore, they know little about their workplaces' problems they might face there and where to seek help. They also have little knowledge on HIV/AIDS. The report recommended promoting interregional dialogue and coordination for protection of the rights, health and wellbeing of women migrant workers, developing effective holistic mechanism for the return and reintegration of migrant workers including proper referral to HIV counseling and testing, treatment, care and support services. It also recommended gender responsive HIV education programmes particularly for women migrant workers at pre-departure and post-arrival stages.

Indicators	Findings
Attended Pre-departure Orientation	9% respondents
Migrants tested for HIV	100% respondents
HIV Pre- and Post-test counseling provided	0% respondents
Reported verbal abuse	85% respondents
Reported physical abuse	85% respondents
Reported sexual abuse	20%
Know main modes of transmission for HIV	0% respondents

It is to note that the study covers 247 women migrant workers both returnee and who are on the destination countries including Bahrain, Lebanon and UAE. The key objective of the research was to encapsulate migrants' voices in terms of the vulnerabilities they face during the entire migration process that ultimately lead them to

HIV. In addition, to identify the current HIV responses, gaps and challenges both in the countries of origin and destinations, and to propose research, policy and programme recommendations related to HIV prevention, testing and care issues among migrant workers, particularly women migrant workers are other major objectives of the study.

The report drew good attention of national and international media including newspapers, radio, televisions and e-news. Almost all national dailies, television channels and BBC Bangla (based in London) aired the news and interviews of women migrants and the chief researcher & OKUP Chairman.

The launching was followed by a Roundtable Meeting held on 23 November aims to discuss what are the key elements for policy and programmatic action that should be undertaken in Bangladesh. Mr. Rabab Fatima, the regional representative of IOM, South Asia chaired the roundtable discussion while Ms. Caitlen Wiesen, Regional HIV/AIDS Practice Leader and Programme Coordinator Asia & Pacific UNDP Regional Centre, Mr. Salil Panakadan, UNAIDS country coordinator, Bangladesh and Mr. Hazrat Ali, Additional Director General of BMET were the key discussants.

