I. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Epidemiology

- There are various estimates for the size of the MSM and TG population in Thailand. The government has used an estimate of 1.16% of the adult male population, or 210,460 people, however, this is likely to be an underestimate. Various studies have found 3% to 17% of young men have ever had sex with another man. It has been suggested that 3% of the adult male population, or 544,316, is likely to be a more realistic estimate. (References: 8,19,15,17,27,36,47)

- The country-wide HIV prevalence estimate for MSM and TG was reported as 13.53% in the 2010 UNGASS report, down from 25% reported in 2008. (38,56)

- In Bangkok, HIV prevalence was 17.3% in 2003, 28.3% in 2005, 30.8% in 2007, and 24.7% in 2009. (38,48,52,53,56)

- In Chiang Mai, HIV prevalence was 15.3% in 2005 and 17% in 2007. In Phuket, HIV prevalence was 5.5% in 2005 and 20% in 2007. In Udonthani and Pattalung, HIV prevalence has been recorded at 5%. (10,38,52,53)

- The country-wide prevalence among TG was 13.5% in 2005: 11.5% in Bangkok; 17.6% in Chiang Mai; and 11.9% in Phuket. (50)

- Among male sex workers, HIV prevalence in 2005 was found to be 14.5% among venue-based workers, and 22.6% among street-based workers. (49)

- In 2005, the prevalence among MSM who also had sex with women was 8.2% (as compared to 21.2% among MSM-only). (18)

- The estimated HIV prevalence among MSM and TG was 18-20 times higher than the national prevalence rate of 1.4% in 2007. Given the different prevalence estimates, the range for specific sub-groups is from 12.1 to 22.1 times higher. (2,38,42)

- In 2005, male-male sex contributed to 22% of new infections. (24,47)

- It is estimated that in 2008, there were 45,557 MSM living with HIV in Thailand. (36)

- The self-reported history of genital STIs among MSM was 18.5% in 2005, and 16% in 2007. (53)

Behaviour, Knowledge and Social Research relating to HIV

- Large studies with MSM have shown that in 2003, 97.9% of MSM reported ever having anal sex, 95.7% reported this in 2005, and 87.5% reported this in 2007. (53)

- In 2005, 81.5% of MSM who also had sex with women reported usually taking the insertive role in anal sex, while 2.7% usually took the receptive role, and 15.9% took both roles. In MSM who had sex with men only, these percentages were 34.8%, 35.5% and 29.7% respectively. (18)

- In 2007, 89% of MSM in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket reported condom use at the last occasion of anal sex with a male partner. (26)

- From 2003 to 2007, 64% of MSM reported that they always used condoms with all male steady and casual partners in the last 3 months. (53)

- In 2005, consistent condom use over the past 3 months was higher among MSM who also has sex with women (77.6%) as compared to MSM-only (62.9%). However, among MSM who also had sex with women, consistent condom use over the past 3 months with female partners was lower (44.4%). (18)

- In 2005, 37% of 927 MSM reported having unprotected sex with a male in the last 3 months. 45% had unprotected sex with male steady partners; 21% had unprotected sex with casual partners; and 14% had unprotected sex with both types of partners. (21)

- In 2010, the UNGASS report stated that 21.3% of MSM in three provinces had been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months and knew the result, down from 35% in 2007. (26,56)

- The number of MSM who had ever been tested for HIV increased from 43.8% in 2003 to 52.3% in 2007. (53)

- In 2007 and 2009, approximately 25% of MSM could correctly identify ways of preventing sexual transmission of HIV and rejected major misconceptions. (26,56)
Many MSM in Thailand also have sex with women. Between 2003-07, estimates ranged from 34.2% to 42.3% who had ever had sex with a woman. In 2005, 20% had sex with a woman in the past year. In 2003, 22.3% had had sex with both men and women in the previous 6 months, and in 2007, 28.6% had had sex with both men and women in the past 3 months. (18,21,52,53)

In 2005, 4% of 927 MSM had paid for sex in the last 3 months. (21)

In Bangkok, 17% in 2005 and 17.3% in 2007 of MSM had sex in exchange for money, favours or valuables. (53)

In 2007, MSM who also had sex with women were more likely (61.1%) to have had sex for money, favours or valuables than MSM-only (34.1%). (18)

In 2005, 34% of 927 MSM were not concerned at all about becoming infected with HIV, and 57% felt that way about acquiring an STI. (21)

In 2005, MSM obtained HIV information from the following sources: TV (90%), newspapers (83%), radio (81%), friends (57%), the internet (51%), health professionals (47%), school (43%) and family (36%). (21)

Factors associated with HIV prevalence have been reported. These include: social isolation (57.6%), suicidal thoughts (27.6%), drug use (23.6%), selling sex (19.8%), a history of coerced sex (19%) and binge drinking (12.7%). Men experiencing 5 of these factors were found to be almost twice as likely to be HIV positive as those experiencing one of them. (50)

**Legal Situation and Law Enforcement Authorities**

- Sex between males is legal. (44)
- Sex work is illegal. (14)
- Sex on premises venues (such as saunas) are illegal. Sex venues still operate, but are registered as other types of businesses. (31)
- The law does not allow TG to change sex/gender on official documents and records. New regulations have been introduced around sex change operations. Under-18s are banned from these operations, 18-20 year olds need parental permission, and all people need to live as a woman for 2 years and see a psychiatrist before the operation. (44)
- In 2006, it was reported that MSM/TG faced problems with law enforcement authorities, especially in sex venues during the 2001-06 “social order campaign”. However, it is not clear whether police currently interfere. The situation has improved, but condoms are still not widely available in saunas. (7,30,31,37,44)
- The legal system has been classified as “neutral” for MSM/TG in two UN reviews. (11,44)

TG are not eligible for the military draft due to “gender identity disorder”, which is seen as a permanent mental illness and may have implications for employment. (31,44)

**MSM Community, other Social Research and Stigma/Discrimination**

- Thailand has a large MSM and TG community, with social and entertainment venues (bars, pubs, clubs), sex venues (saunas), male massage parlours, MSM media, human rights organisations/networks, and MSM social groups. (31)
- According to a mapping exercise conducted by UNESCO, there are 30 saunas in Bangkok. (45)
- Given the high rates of MSM activity in Thailand, it is likely that most MSM do not identify as “gay” but do report homosexual and bisexual practices.

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- Of those with non-heterosexual identities, Thai sexual/gender identities charted include: *kathoey/saaw praphet song* (TG), *gay* (*king, queen, quing*), *bi*, and *chaay-rak-chaay* (*man loving man*). (28)
- Despite an international reputation as a very accepting place for MSM and TG, the people and Government of Thailand tolerate these groups but do not necessarily accept them. Many policymakers believe homosexuality is inappropriate or misdirected. (34,41)
II. THE RESPONSE TO HIV

Government Response

- There is a specific program line for MSM in the national strategic plan (NSP 2006-2010). (24)
- There is also a specific budget line for MSM, accounting for 1.3% of the HIV budget. (37)
- The NSP includes: HIV prevention, MSM & HIV specific support services, peer outreach, community engagement and empowerment, strengthening of MSM CBOs, targeted condom and lubricant distribution. (37)
- The current NSP ends in 2010. (24)
- Thailand has received funds from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In Round 8, there was a focus on MSM, with USD $10 million over five years. The proposal aims to reach 39,902 MSM/TG, primarily through CBOs and NGOs. The Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand (a CBO) is the sub-recipient for the MSM section of the grant. (36,47)
- In 2010, the Government of Thailand reported on 3 out of the 5 UNGASS indicators directly relevant to MSM. In 2008, the UNGASS report included 4 indicators. (1,56)
- In 2006, it was reported that Thailand had no local MSM-related leadership, such as politicians or spokespeople. However, since then, there appears to be some spokespeople, such as an academic who was heavily involved in the drafting of the Yogyakarta Principles (37,43).

Community-based Response

- MSM are formally and informally organised, with CBOs, outreach programs, and a national network. (37)
- There are approximately 20-23 organisations focused in the MSM, TG or PLHIV communities. (46)
- Organisations include: the Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand (MSM, lesbians, TG); Bangkok Rainbow Organisation (MSM); MPlus (MSM and male sex workers); SWING (male sex workers); Sisters (TG); Violet Home (MSM with HIV); and The Poz (MSM with HIV). (46)
- MSM/TG CBOs conduct a wide range of HIV-related activities and services, including: peer outreach and education, drop-in centres, condom and lubricant distribution, social marketing, health counselling, community awareness events, advocacy, peer support for PLHIV, and STI clinic and VCT referral. (46)

Support from multi-laterals and international NGOs

- International and local NGOs have conducted and supported MSM and TG programs in Thailand. For example, these include: FHI, PACT, PSI, HIV/AIDS Alliance, and the Thai Red Cross. (46)
- UN agencies such as UNESCO and the WHO have conducted and supported programs with MSM and TG. (36,46)

Strategic Information

- There is ongoing research on MSM/TG in Thailand, conducted by academics, NGOs, government agencies (including the bilateral partnership between the Ministry of Public Health and the US CDC). (37)
- MSM and TG are not part of the regular government surveillance system. (37)
- Special surveys have been conducted with MSM, TG and male sex workers in three provinces in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009. (26)

Health System

- In 2009, there were 6 MSM-specific clinics. (2)

National and International Networks

- Thailand has the National MSM Network focusing on MSM and HIV, as well as the national Sexual Diversity Network, which has a broader mandate for all “people with sexual diversity”. (31)
- Thailand is represented on the “Purple Sky Network” for the Greater Mekong Subregion. (31)

III. THE RESULTS

Coverage of prevention

- In 2005, the government reported 1% of 3 million MSM had been reached with prevention activities (15,000 MSM). (35)
- The government did not report on the coverage of prevention activities indicator in its 2008 or 2010 UNGASS reports. (26,56)

Resource Estimation and Gaps

- In 2006, it was estimated that USD $11 million would be needed to achieve 60% coverage with peer education, outreach, VCT, and condom/lubricant distribution. (22)
- In 2009, it was estimated that over the next 5 years (2010-2014), USD $37.9 million will be needed to achieve 80% coverage. It is also estimated that 71.3% of the required resources are currently unavailable. (29)
IV. RECOMMENDED RESPONSES

List of recommended actions

- Remove laws impeding effective HIV prevention, including laws affecting sex workers.
- The to-be-developed National strategic plan 2011-2015 should include a costed comprehensive response for MSM and TG.
- Advocate for the inclusion of MSM in HIV strategies at the provincial level through provincial strategies and plans.
- More systematic and regular surveillance of HIV rates, risk behaviors and MSM communities.
- Fully fund prevention programs, including condom and lubricant provision, peer education and outreach, community development, mass media, and individual counseling.
- Develop the capacity of MSM community-based organizations to provide advocacy and peer-based programs.
- Scale up MSM-friendly VCT and sexual health screening centers.
- Expand care, treatment and support facilities for HIV-positive MSM and TG.
- Address stigma and discrimination toward PLHIV in MSM communities.
- Specific prevention activities should focus on transgender people.

V. REFERENCES

All references are available at:
www.apcom.org/snapshots2010.html

Contact details of UNAIDS office in Thailand are available at: