

# FACT SHEET

## HIV/AIDS AND UNIFORMED SERVICES



Uniformed services, including defence and civil defence forces, are a highly vulnerable group to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) mainly due to their work environment, mobility, age and other facilitating factors that expose them to higher risk of HIV infection. Simultaneously, uniformed services also offer a unique opportunity for HIV awareness and training with a large 'captive audience' in a disciplined and highly organized setting. At the same time, uniformed services, including armed forces and police, are often perceived as role models in their society.

Among male population groups studied, military and police generally report higher levels of HIV/AIDS infection than the national average in many countries. Military personnel, in particular, are a population group at special risk of exposure to STIs, including HIV/AIDS. In peacetime, STI rates among armed forces are generally 2 to 5 times higher than in civilian populations; in times of conflict the difference can be much higher.

### Key issues to consider in the military environment that raise the risk of HIV infection



Most personnel are in the age group at greatest risk for HIV infection, the sexually active group under 24 years of age.

The military's professional ethos tends to excuse or even encourage risk-taking.

Military personnel and camps, including installations of peacekeeping forces, attract sex workers and those who deal in illicit drugs.

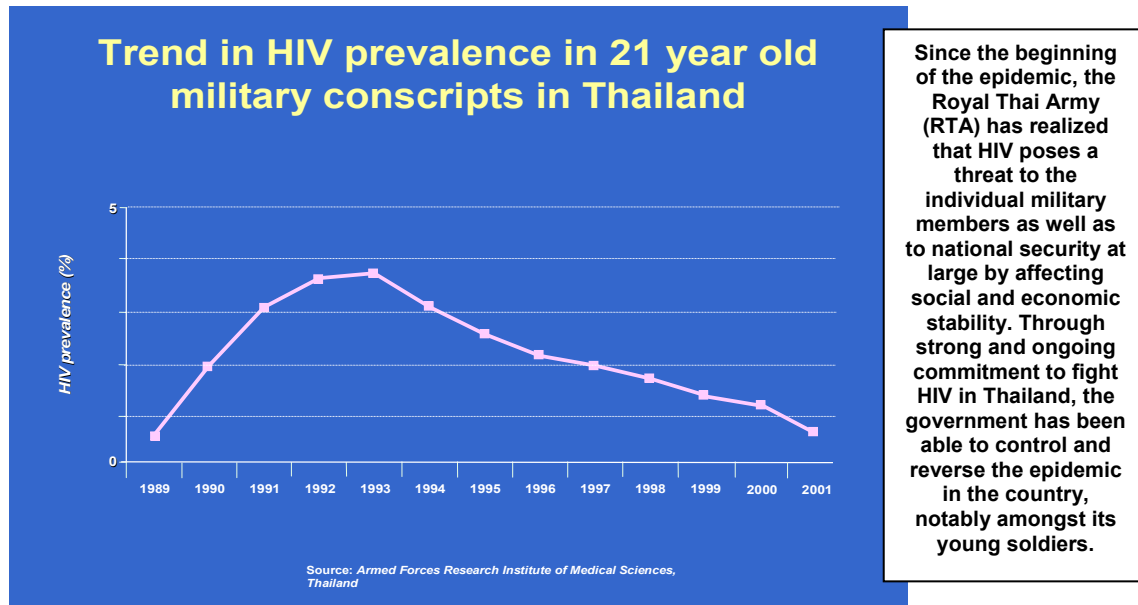
Military and peacekeeping service often includes lengthy periods spent away from home. As a result, personnel are often looking for ways of relieving loneliness, stress and the build-up of sexual tension.

Among uniformed services, youths and young recruits exert strong influence on their peers, within and outside the service. They are also the potential future officers, leaders and decision-makers in their country.

**Young people** are at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Half of all new HIV/AIDS infections occur among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 – the most sexually active age group. Their behaviour, the extent to which their rights are protected, and the services and information they receive determine the quality of life of millions of people.

**Personnel posted abroad** far from their accustomed community or their families for long periods of time put them at higher risk of STI/HIV/ infection and/or transmission. Personnel sent on peacekeeping missions often have more financial resources than

local people, giving them the means to purchase sex. As a result, local sex industries grow in response to demand from military bases and units.



**Demobilized Personnel.** HIV/AIDS is a threat not only to uniformed personnel but also to their families and other social contacts, including sex workers. In this regard, STI/HIV/AIDS interventions among uniformed services are most effective if there is close collaboration with civilian health and education authorities. In many countries, a large proportion of the nation's young adults spend one or more years in the military either through conscription or volunteering. The number of people returning to civilian life is consequently very high both in number and in potential impact at all levels of society.

### **UNAIDS promotes young recruits as key advocates for AIDS awareness**

In response to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, through and its relevant Co-sponsors and implementing partners, is actively supporting HIV/AIDS awareness activities among national uniformed services, particularly young recruits. Approximately 40 countries, including in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, have been selected for the first phase of this global initiative on HIV/AIDS and security. UNAIDS has developed a strategic action plan on HIV/AIDS interventions among uniformed services and provides support materials<sup>1</sup> to relevant ministries and implementing partners to build national strategic HIV/AIDS interventions for uniformed services, with emphasis on young recruits.

***“By 2003, have in place national strategies to address the spread of HIV among national uniformed services, where this is required, including armed forces and civil defence force and consider ways of using personnel from these services who are educated and trained in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention to assist with HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention activities including participation in emergency, humanitarian, disaster relief and rehabilitation assistance”***

**UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, 27 June 2001**