

# Harm reduction in Thailand



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# HIV situation in Thailand

- Thailand was identified as one of the 24 high Priority Countries for UNODC's HIV/AIDS programme.
- The Government of Thailand has implemented activities to reduce harms associated with injection drug use in several sites over the past years.
- However, at present access to and uptake of HIV services which could prevent a large number of new infections among people who inject drugs remains low.

# Legal issues

- Thai Government has not legislated Harm reduction interventions or embraced a harm reduction perspective.
- Drug users have been labeled as criminals rather than patients even though by the Narcotic Act 2002 they are to be considered patients who require treatment.

# Police policies

- Thai policing system very much depends on politics by law.
- Obviously, National Police Chief has been appointed or dismissed by PM, according to the law.
- It is likely to be an impediment when populist politics are at play such as ‘operation crackdown’.
- Drug crackdowns continue to be popular with government making it harder for police to consider alternative responses despite many police knowing how much time and resources manning drug issues puts on their workload.

# Policing activities

- Police in Thailand do not receive harm reduction training nor any training with regards their role in working for HIV prevention among key affected populations such as sex workers, drug users or prisoners.
- Thai police are also inundated with issues of amphetamine trafficking and use which essentially overwhelms their capacity and resources.
- Overcrowded prisons and criminal justice systems.

# Police training

- The understanding of harm reduction perspective should be embedded into law enforcement officers' heads through training programs at both local and national level.
- It needs to build awareness of the benefits for police of embracing harm reduction in terms of positive impacts on community safety.

# Police perspective

- Changing negative police perceptions towards drug users is very important.
- It cannot be changed in a short period of time.
- Police support for harm reduction can influence government policies to adopt a public health approach towards drug users.

# Future engagement

- Police curriculums are necessary to be re-evaluated and reformed in accordance with harm reduction and HIV prevention among all key affected populations awareness.
- It needs to build on some of the smaller efforts going on such as the intern programs of the Sex Workers in Network Group where police cadets spend time with NGO SWING.



# Summary

- A few strategies are required.
- Peer-to-peer advocacy has been a successful advocacy strategy for many kinds of public health causes.
- Broader drug policy reform is necessary.
- Senior police administrators need to learn about the concept of harm reduction so that police policies will be reviewed and reformed.

# Summary (Continued)

- The LEAH Network is an effective strategy and it is a useful tool.
- It provides an opportunity for police to discuss the success and failure of drug law enforcement and harm reduction approaches in different places around the world.
- It needs to establish Country Focal Points (CFP) who will understand the local context of policy, police and law enforcement culture to work with the police as well as a range of agencies in other sectors.



# Harm reduction at community level



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