

Epidemiology **Bulletin**

REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Prostitutes and AIDS

Since long, there have been all kinds of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) everywhere in the world, and prostitutes are considered one of the most important media of transmission. Ever since the US and the European medical research institutes reported on AIDS in 1981, in the last six years there have been, according to the rather conservative report of WHO on 2 December 1987, 71,751 cases in 158 areas and countries around the world. Two-thirds (65.5%) of them are in the USA, 74.9% in the Americas, 12.0% in Europe, 11.8% in Africa, and 0.29% in Asia. In Asia, there have been only 211 cases¹.

By the routes of transmission, most cases in USA and Europe are male homosexuals, drug addicts and persons receiving contaminated blood. The male and female ratio is 16:1. Most cases in Asia (including antibody positive cases) are hemophilia patients receiving contaminated blood preparations. Very few of them are homosexuals. In Taiwan, ROC, 15 cases have been identified; in Japan, 5; and in Thailand, 6 cases are reported to have had sexual contacts with foreigners. In Africa, the male and female ratio is 1:1. The mode of transmission is considered to be through heterosexual contacts².

There have been few official reports in Asia on the infection of AIDS through heterosexual contacts. However, last Autumn in Japan in Nagano Prefecture, a Filipino female worker was found antibody positive, and later in January 1988 in Kobe, a young Japanese woman was reported to die of AIDS³. In September 1987, one man each in Korea and Japan was reported to have contracted AIDS through prostitute (the Korean was only 21 years of age). These findings have caused more concerns and fear on the mode of transmission of AIDS in other Asian countries.

The situation in Taiwan, ROC, is better. Up until present, no HIV case through heterosexual contact has been identified. Health and medical care institutions should implement as soon as possible intensified health education programs and overall HIV screening services to the relatively high risk groups at various levels.

Reported by Dr ST Hsu, Director, and Mr SY Lin, Section Chief, National Institute of Preventive Medicine, Department of Health, the Executive Yuan.

Editorial note: There are a number of women engaged in prostitution in Taiwan Area. They are the high risk group of AIDS. Results of the HIV screening tests of these women in prostitution conducted by research organizations concerned in Taiwan Area show that none is HIV carrier (Table 2). In 1985, a 52-year old prostitute was found positive (Eliza, Litton-Bionetics) at the OPD of the Taipei VD Center. After careful questioning and examination, except strong VDRL reactions, no AIDS symptoms were found on the case⁵. Repeated HIV tests (Eliza, Abbott Laboratory) also showed negative results. Recent US studies show that the major route of HIV infection of prostitutes is the abuse of venous drugs. The results also show that the risk of getting HIV infection is less among prostitutes who are taking some protective measures (such as requesting partners to wear condoms). The HIV infection rate among prostitutes without protective measures is as high as 11%; no prostitute taking protective measures has been found positive carriers². Other studies also show that correct and regular use of condoms greatly reduce the risk of HIV infection^(6,7,8).

To control the transmission of HIV through sexual activities, some states in the USA require by law that persons applying for practice licenses in the prostitution must go through safety tests for STDs (including HIV). Individuals engaged in sexual trade must accept blood tests for STDs (including HIV). Persons knowing or being told that they are HIV positive and still engage in sex trade are considered illegal. Some states have special organizations offering free educational materials and choices of STD (including HIV) tests to persons arrested for either engaging in or visiting illegal sex trade.

Until now, the HIV test results of persons in prostitution in Taiwan Area have been negative. The following defensive and protective measures should be jointly taken by persons in special businesses, medical personnel, and health organizations:

1. Public and private organizations concerned should create special units to study, coordinate, and control the HIV infections (including other STD's) of both the prostitutes and clients of the prostitution and to offer them health education.
2. When testing or treating both the prostitutes and clients for STD, medical personnel should offer them proper education and refer them to relevant organizations for more comprehensive services and follow-up.
3. To protect the health of the individuals and the public, prostitutes and their clients must always take protective measures (such as wearing condoms) to reduce the risk of infection. They should also subject to periodical HIV and other STD tests. When infected, they should be encouraged to ask for assistance at specialized agencies. They should not avoid treatment nor accept any folk prescriptions to delay the cure.

4. For further information, please call:

- (1) DOH AIDS hot line (02-3962847)
- (2) Taipei VD Center (02-3719919)
- (3) National Taiwan University Hospital (02-3123456 × 2221)
- (4) Veterans General Hospitals (02-8712121 × 2049 in Taipei, and 04-2522311 × 2303 in Taichung)
- (5) Kaohsiung Medical College (07-3214227)

Table 1. HIV antibody positive rates by serological test for prostitutes in USA, Kenya, Japan, Thailand, and ROC

Area	No. tested	No. positive	Percentage
USA ^{2,3} (whole country)	835	98	11.7
New York ³	56	32	57.1
Kenya (Nairobi) ²	215	126	58.6
Japan (Osaka) ³	790	0	0
ROC (Taiwan Area) ⁴	422	0	0
Thailand ²	916	0	0

*Test result, August 1987, National Institute of Preventive Medicine, DOH

Table 2. HIV antibody screening results for women in the prostitution by various research institutes, ROC

Research institute	No. tested	Result	Date
Immuno-allergy Dep't, NTUH	515*	0	Aug. 1985
Institute of Public Health, Kaohsiung Medical College	273	0	Feb. 1986
Bio-Medical Research Institute, Academia Sinica	650*	0	Jan. 1987
Bio-Medical Research Institute, Academia Sinica	961*	0	Jun. 1987
National Institute of Preventive Medicine, DOH	422*	0	Aug. 1987
Total	2,821	0	

* Serum specimens supplied by the Taipei VD Center.

* Serum specimens supplied by health bureaus/stations and other related organizations.

References:

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2. Centers for Disease Control: Antibody to human immunodeficiency virus in female prostitutes MMWR 1987, 36:157-61.
3. AIDS: Neoteric publication (Japan).
4. J. of Clinical and Experimental Medicine. 1987, 141 No. 10.
5. Department of Health. AIDS added to list of reportable disease, Epidemiological Bulletin (ROC) 1985; 1:49-51.
6. Mann J, Quinn TC, Piot P, et al. Condom use and HIV infection among prostitutes in Zaire (letter). N Eng J Med, 1987; 316:345.
7. Smith GL, Smith KF. Lack of HIV infection and condom use in licensed prostitutes (letter). Lancet 1986; 2: 1392.
8. Conant M, Hardy D, Sernatinger J, Spicer D, Levy JA. Condoms prevent transmission of AIDS-associated retrovirus (letter). JAMA 1986; 255: 1706.