

Protecting the Unprotected

Drug-Use, Sex-Work and Rights in Pakistan's Fight Against HIV/AIDS

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1. Objectives

To investigate the nature and extent of HIV-risk practices among vulnerable groups (injecting drug users and sex workers) and how human rights violations may exacerbate these practices.

3. Background

There is consensus that public-health interventions are most effective if they also respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those people they are concerned with (1, 2). In Pakistan vulnerable groups (injecting drug users and sex workers) are the focus of HIV/AIDS policy but their rights have received little attention and there are no specific laws to protect them. They face high levels of discrimination and contempt from society in general and are subject to harassment and incarceration by the authorities (1, 3). As in other Asian countries, discrimination and abuse of injecting drug users and sex workers (including physical and sexual violence from state authorities) risks pushing them into higher-risk behaviour, including making them reluctant to attend needle-exchange or condom promotion programs for fear of being identified (3-6).

4. Results

4.1 Abuse by Non-State Actors

Table 1: Percentage of sex workers reporting abuse in the last year, by category of perpetrator and type of abuse

Perpetrator of violence and type of sex worker	Nature of abuse			
	Verbal abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Pimped against their will
Clients				
FSWs (n=427)	49.9	40.8	22.2	-
Khusra (n=251)	57.8	35.7	28.2	-
Khotki (n=363)	56.1	44.3	28.3	-
Bantha (n=197)	44.2	25.8	11.1	-
Neighbours				
FSW (n=427)	44.1	25.1	13.8	-
Khusra (n=251)	40.6	9.9	19.8	-
Khotki (n=363)	27.2	11.9	8	-
Bantha (n=197)	18.8	5.1	8.1	-
Husbands				
FSW (n=427)	64.2	64.4	30.9	43
Lovers/ favourite client				
FSW (n=427)	52.5	11.9	50.9	47.5

All groups experience widespread abuse from people they have contact with.

Physical & Sexual Violence

The nature of abuse ranges from verbal abuse to physical beatings, sexual assault and rape (Table 1).



Sex workers in Karachi
Greenstar Social Marketing

All sex-workers experienced abuse from 'bad clients': physical abuse (burning with cigarettes), refusing to use condoms, engaging in practices that increased the likelihood of tears and wounds (forcing anal sex, taking a long time to ejaculate - especially drug users) or bringing multiple other clients (usually unpaid). By contrast 'A good client is the one who gives respect' (Khotki 8).

Social violations of 'rights'

All groups prized public respect; MSWs & IDUs felt their rights to function as part of a family and be respected in society were widely violated:

"We cannot get jobs, our brothers are preferred over us in the family ... He [MSW] is ignored in the family ... everybody stares at him. He is always frightened of being disgraced in the public." (Khotki 2).

'For example, IDU's sister is getting married then his family members will ask him to stay away from other guests in the function so that the others might not get the impression that bride's brother is an IDU ... He feels - I can not express his feelings in words; he sheds blood tears...' (IDU 11).

5. Conclusions

This research has revealed high levels of abuse of human dignity of all vulnerable groups studied by families, neighbours, police and prison authorities. The abuse faced by these groups is not only a violation of their physical and mental integrity but also leads to increased risk of HIV.

Sex-workers experienced tears and wounds to the vaginal or anal tracts through physical and sexual abuse, leading to increased risk of HIV/STI infection. IDUs HIV risk is from sharing of needles and syringes; police confiscation of their injecting equipment or drugs increases the likelihood that IDUs have to share needles/ syringes (7).



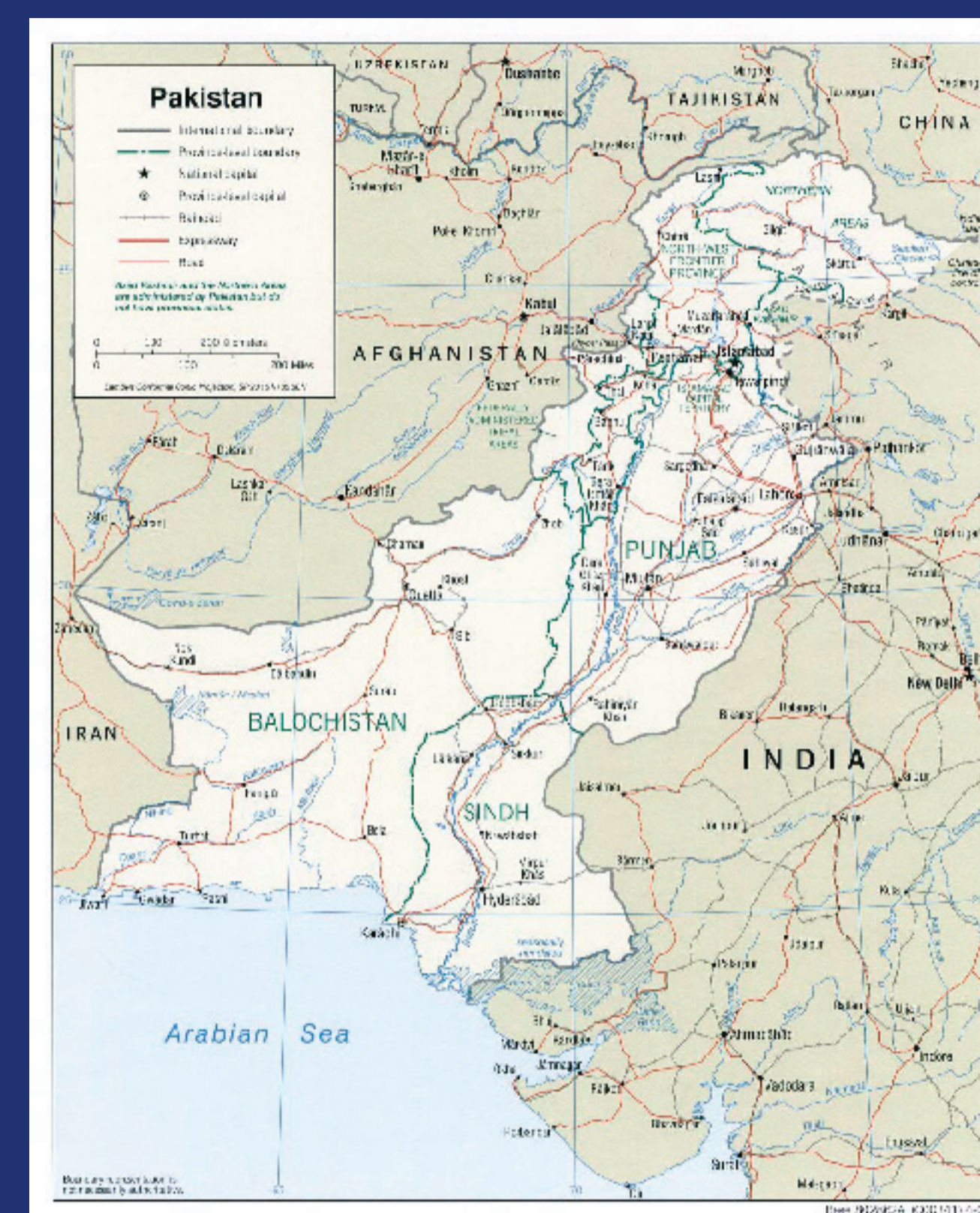
Research team discussing findings - Islamabad, January 2007

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2. Methods

In-depth interviews with 38 high-risk respondents (injecting drug users; female, male and transgender sex workers) in Rawalpindi. A bio-behavioural survey conducted with 813 IDU/sex worker respondents in Rawalpindi.



4.2 Abuse by State Actors

Table 2: Percentage of sex workers reporting harassment and violence by state actors: Rawalpindi

	Bantha	Khotki	Khusras	FSWs
In last 12 months:	n=198	n=363	n=252	n=427
Verbal abuse by police	32.3	43.4	59.1	10.1
Beaten by the police	25.8	44.4	35.7	4.2
Sexually assaulted by police	11.1	28.3	28.2	7.3
Gave free sex to police	31.3	34.3	41.7	40.9
Bribe given to police	25.3	49.7	55.8	61.2
Ever (lifetime):	n=198	n=363	n=252	n=427
Ever been arrested	6.6	19	21.8	4.2
Ever been in prison	1.5	2.5	2	4
Of those ever in prison:	n=3	n=9	n=5	n=17
Ever raped while in prison	0	55.6	40	58.8

Police exploitation & negotiation

Qualitative interviews showed all sex worker groups were exploited by police who played on their fear of exposure or raids to negotiate bribes of money or free sex from the sex workers and their managers:

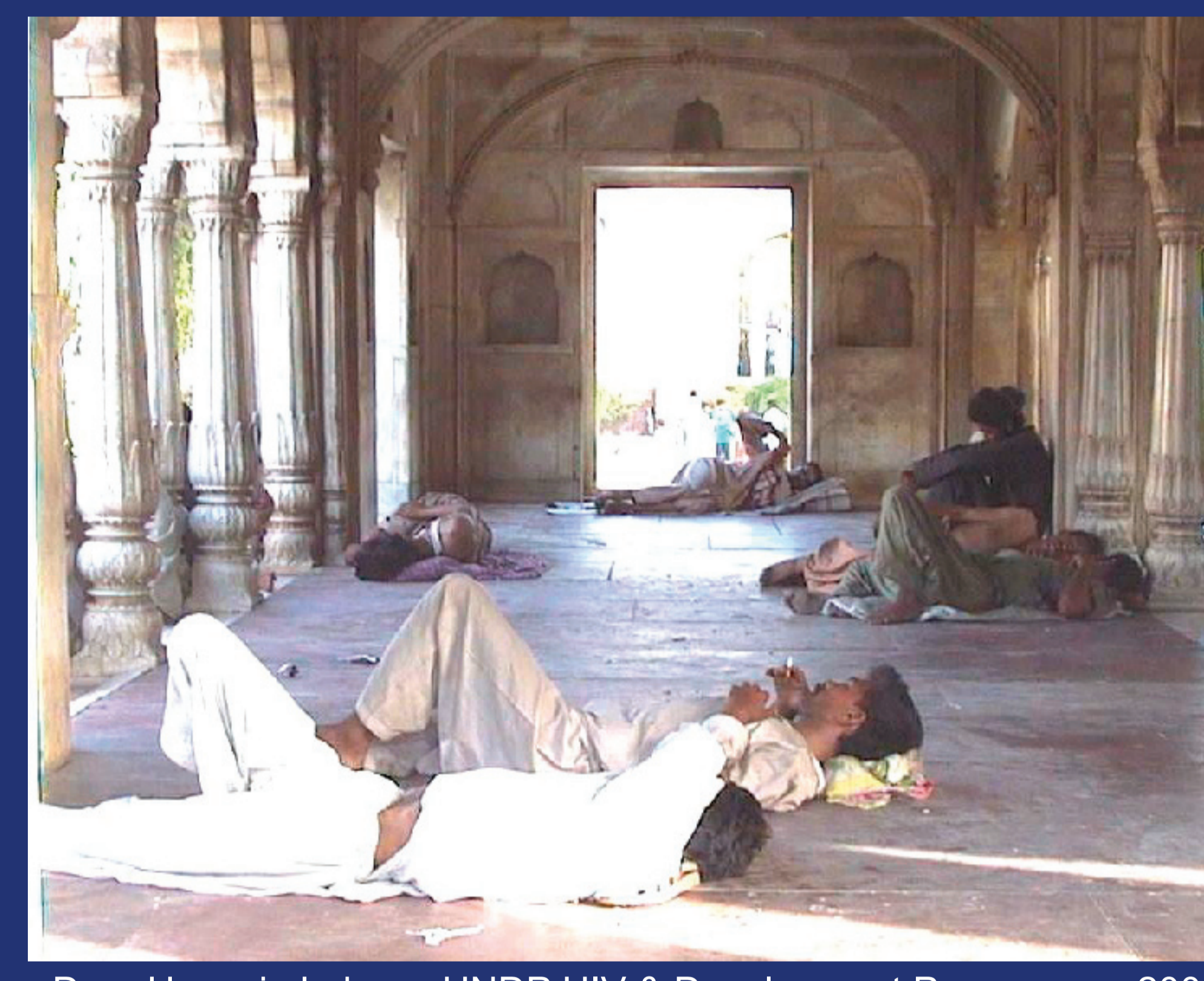
"[we] either provide free sex to the policemen or give some weekly or monthly amount." (Khotki 11).

"[Police say] give us a nice girl and then do as much business as you want ..." (FSW 1).

The relationships with police were complex and FSWs in particular seemed adept at negotiating strategically useful relationships.

IDUs had no wealth, little autonomy and therefore little possibility of negotiating with police. Between 10-20% IDUs in the survey (n=301) had surrendered injecting equipment or drugs the last time they were stopped by police and 40% had given money. 20% had ever been arrested and 14% imprisoned. The qualitative interviews showed the extreme lengths some would go to in order to avoid arrest and incarceration:

"Sometimes they [IDUs] would cut themselves with some blade ... near their neck. This scares the policemen that they might get into trouble because of him so they let him go." (IDU 2).



Drug Users in Lahore; UNDP HIV & Development Programme, 2000

6. Recommendations

- The Government of Pakistan should take immediate steps to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention Against Torture (CAT)
- Local lawyers, legal and rights groups should bring legal challenges to ensure the government adequately protects the health and dignity of these vulnerable groups.
- The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) should:
 - o support interventions to improve access to and quality of services for vulnerable groups;
 - o address cultural and social stigma, essential for protecting dignity and autonomy of vulnerable groups;
 - o openly acknowledge the role of police in increasing HIV-risk in these groups and work with police to reduce this risk.



Research team members and staff of OSD - Islamabad, January 2007

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