

# Opportunities to reach Residence Based Female Sex Workers (RBFSW) through Cell Phones –an experience from Bangladesh

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# Background

Though the HIV prevalence rate among Female Sex Workers has remained <1% since 1998 in Bangladesh, the rates of active syphilis in urban areas are high, calling for continued prevention efforts. NGOs encounter challenges to reach residence based FSWs because of their hidden nature. To find out the operational dynamics to reach them this study was conducted to unveil innovative outreach approaches as per the dynamics of residence-based sex trade in Bangladesh.

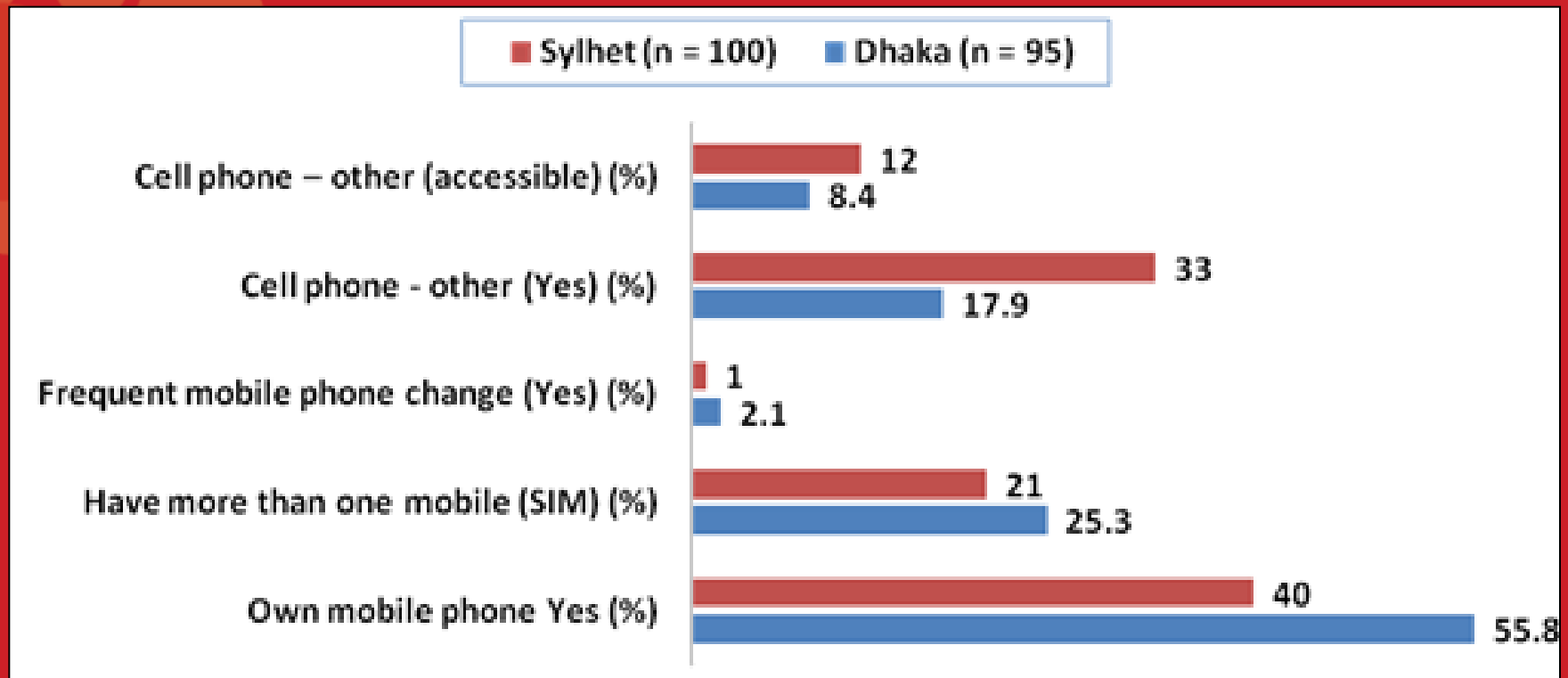


**AIDS 2010**  
XVIII INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE  
JULY 18-23 | 2010 | MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

# Methods

- The study was employed in Dhaka and Sylhet districts
- Total 45 in-depth interviews with RBFSW (25 in Dhaka, 20 in Sylhet)
- 43 key-informant interviews with NGO-staff, National AIDS/STD Program, the power structure of sex trade, law enforcers, and regular clients (26 in Dhaka, 17 in Sylhet) and 14 focus group discussions (6 in Dhaka, 8 in Sylhet) with RBFSW, peer educators, and service providers conducted
- Moreover, a quantitative survey was conducted among 195 RBFSW (100 in Sylhet, 95 in Dhaka)

# Ownership and use of Cell phone among FSW



# Results

- Mean ( $\pm$ SD) age of RBFSWs was 23.3 ( $\pm$ 5.64) years in Dhaka and 22.80 ( $\pm$ 4.08) in Sylhet
- Resident Based Sex Workers (RBSW) were permanent (business at fixed site) to mobile (business in different locations)
- About half in Dhaka and one-third in Sylhet also sold sex in hotels and on streets
- Mobility is influenced by client flow and security issues; the “Sardarnis” (owner of the girl) and pimps being the usual decision-makers
- One-fifth RBFSW preferred communication through cell phones to counter identity disclosure through outreach services
- About 50% RBFSW possess and use cell phones to contact clients. Others borrow it from their power structure
- Many peer educators use cell phones to contact RBFSW, Sardarnis and pimps
- All acknowledged the potentiality of cell phones in HIV interventions.



# Conclusion

- Considering its use in networking, the project adopted potential strategies to communicate with RBFSW through cell phones for their participation in interventions. Coordination, monitoring field and solving problems and implementation are other uses.