

Bangladesh

A HIDDEN DISEASE IN A VULNERABLE COMMUNITY

The final death toll in the 2013 garment factory building collapse in Savar, Bangladesh was 1,124, with 234 bodies still unidentified. In life as in death, the garment workers of Bangladesh remain largely unknown to the world. The ready-made garment workers (RMG) of Bangladesh are particularly vulnerable to tuberculosis because the vast majority of them are migrant women of reproductive age - without extended family support - living and working in crowded and unsanitary conditions for poor pay. Most of them are not aware of the symptoms of TB. Even if they are aware, they have very little free time to seek health care which, as with health education opportunities, is in any case frequently inaccessible for them.



Centre for Woman and Child Health (CWCH)

TB Reach Garment Workers Screening Project in Bangladesh

A response to the garment district's TB epidemic

In response to the deadly threat of TB to the garment industry, the Centre for Woman and Child Health (CWCH), with TB Reach wave 3 funding, is implementing an extensive screening program for 500,000 RMG workers in 600 factories located in the Savar Ashulia area.

A 15-member screening team enters a factory (average size 2,500 workers) at 9 in the morning and for the next eight hours screens every worker and staff member in the factory by using a 9-11 question screening tool for TB.

On average, 3.6% of workers screened each day are considered by the team to have TB symptoms. A doctor accompanying the team then examines these workers to decide whether they should receive a chest x-ray and have their sputum collected for AFB microscopy. Roughly 90% of workers with suspected TB are currently having chest x-rays ordered and are being tested with sputum microscopy.

Such a large program is not without its challenges, including the daily time constraints on workers, which prevent them from coming to the Centre for chest x-ray, even though this is provided free of cost, along with transportation. To overcome this problem we have recently commissioned a mobile chest x-ray bus to increase chest x-ray follow-up, thus enhancing TB case detection.

Once a garments worker is diagnosed with TB, contact tracing is conducted at his/her place of residence. Under this program, all contacts are provided chest x-ray and Mantoux Test. In addition, a GeneXpert machine has been installed at CWCH, and any TB suspect with an NTP-defined indication for Gene Xpert testing is tested.

The biggest barrier to this program has been the reluctance of factory managers to allow the screening team to enter factories due to fears that the process will hamper productivity. In spite of these obstacles, by December 2013, 155 factories had been contacted by the program; 80 factories, comprising 120,000 workers, had been thoroughly screened; and 200 TB cases had been detected and have already commenced treatment.

Stop TB Partnership
TB REACH