



SUCCESS STORY

Finding Community and HIV Prevention Services at *Shustha Jibon*

In Dhaka, *hijras* access HIV and STI services.



Ian Taylor

Pahari teaches sex workers about condom negotiation.

“*Shustha Jibon* gave me the confidence to move forward.”

– *Pahari*

Pahari was born in 1957 as a male and went by the name Nazrul. But at age 10, she started to realize that she did not feel like a boy: She loved to dress in women’s clothes and behaved like a female. Her classmates and relatives did not accept this; they often harassed her and sometimes beat her, which left her depressed and lonely.

Because she felt like an outcast, Pahari cut short her academic studies. She managed to get a job as a cook in a Pakistani Army Camp during the Bangladesh Liberation War. On this work site, she experienced sexual abuse by soldiers, who threatened to kill her if she did not have sex with them.

After the war, she didn’t know what else to do to make a living and began selling sex on the streets of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. At the time, Pahari was little aware that she was taking risks that increased her vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Then, a friend introduced Pahari to *Shustha Jibon* (Healthy Life), a community-based organization that is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development through the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and supported by FHI.

Shustha Jibon is managed by and serves *hijras*, the term used in South Asia for people who, like Pahari, are considered “the third gender.” The organization has two health centers in Sympur and Savar, Dhaka, where *hijras* drop in or are referred by outreach workers and peer educators to receive HIV counseling and testing, STI diagnosis and treatment, condoms, and behavior change messages.

At *Shustha Jibon*, Pahari met many others like herself and at last found a place where she felt part of a community and could share her feelings. She began practicing safe sex and soon became an outreach worker. She now works to save lives by promoting condom use, HIV testing, and diagnosis and treatment of STIs. “*Shustha Jibon* gave me the confidence to move forward,” she says.