

WOMEN, GIRLS AND HIV

OVERVIEW

- HIV is the leading cause of death and disease among women of reproductive age (15-49 years) worldwide.¹
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 60 % of the people living with HIV are female (while women make up 50% of the global epidemic).²
- The proportion of women to men living with HIV in Asia rose from 19% in 2000 to 35% in 2008.³
- In Southern Africa prevalence among young women aged 15–24 years is on average about three times higher than among men of the same age.
- Experiencing violence increases the risk of HIV infection by a factor of three.⁴

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IS KEY DRIVER OF HIV EPIDEMIC

- Up to 70% of women experience violence in their lifetime.⁵
- Country studies indicate that the risk of HIV among women who have experienced violence may be up to three times higher than among those who have not.
- Women, fearing or experiencing violence, are less likely to negotiate for safe sex, go for HIV testing, share their HIV status and access treatment.
- Forced sex increases the risk of HIV transmission due to tears and lacerations.
- In South Africa a woman is raped every minute.
 - *South Africa also has the world's largest number of people living with HIV: 5.5 million out of a population of about 48 million.*⁶

SOCIETAL FACTORS THAT PUT WOMEN AT RISK

- In some countries men are encouraged to have more than one sexual partner and it is common for older men to have sexual relations with much younger women.
 - *In some settings, this contributes to a three times higher infection rate among young women (15-24 years) compared to young men.*⁷
- Women are likely to face barriers in accessing HIV prevention, treatment and care services due to limited decision-making power, lack of control over financial resources, restricted mobility and child-care responsibilities.⁸
 - *Women and girls are often the primary care-givers in the family, including for those living with and affected by HIV, hindering their economic opportunities.*
- Many women lose their homes, inheritance, possessions, livelihoods and even their children when their partners die. This forces many women to adopt survival strategies that increase their chances of contracting and spreading HIV.⁹

- Early marriage is still common worldwide, with young girls often forced into marriage and sexual relations, causing health risks, including exposure to HIV.
 - *In certain regions of Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, and Nigeria, at least 40% of women are married before age 15.*¹⁰

EDUCATION

- A lack of education can prevent women from accessing HIV information and services.
 - *Only 38% of young women have accurate, comprehensive knowledge of HIV.*¹¹
- Lack of education affects millions of women and girls hindering their economic security
 - *Two thirds of the 110 million of children not in school are girls.*¹²
 - *Of the world's 875 million illiterate adults, two thirds are women.*¹³
- Illiterate women are four times more likely to believe there is no way to prevent HIV infection.
- In Africa and Latin America, girls with higher levels of education tend to delay first sexual experience and are more likely to insist that their partner use a condom.¹⁴

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UNAIDS

Leveraging the AIDS response, UNAIDS works to build political action and to promote the rights all of people for better results for global health and development. Globally, it sets policy and is the source of HIV-related data. In countries, UNAIDS brings together the resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and 10 UN system organizations for coordinated and accountable efforts to unite the world against AIDS.

www.unaids.org

¹ World Health Organization. "Women and health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda". Geneva, 2009

² UNAIDS AIDS Epidemic Update 2009. Geneva. 2009

³ Ibid

⁴ UNAIDS, Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, Stop Violence Against Women, Fight AIDS, Issue 2 (2005). Citing amfAR, "Gender-Based Violence and HIV Among Women: Assessing the Evidence," Issue Brief no. 3 (June 2005)

⁵ UNiTE Campaign. Accessed on 4/04/2010 at <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/situation.shtml>

⁶ UNiTE Campaign. Accessed on 4/04/2010 at <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/situation.shtml>

⁷ WHO. Gender Inequalities and Health. Accessed on 09/02/2010 at http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/

⁸ WHO. Gender Inequalities and Health. Accessed on 09/02/2010 at http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Southern Africa Partnership Programme 2005: Impact of Home Based Care on Women & Girls in Southern Africa, p6

¹¹ WHO, Gender Inequalities and Health, Accessed on 09/02/2010 at http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/

¹² WHO, Gender Inequalities and Health, Accessed on 09/02/2010 at http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/

¹³ WHO, Gender Inequalities and Health, Accessed on 09/02/2010 at http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/

¹⁴ WHO, Gender Inequalities and Health, Accessed on 09/02/2010 at http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/