



WINNING THE BATTLE TOGETHER

VISION NOV 21.11.17

HIV: TWO WOMEN GET INFECTED EVERY HOUR

IN THE BUILD-UP TO THE WORLD AIDS DAY ON DECEMBER 1, VISION GROUP IS SPEARHEADING THE DRIVE TO GET EVERYBODY BACK AND INVOLVED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS. THROUGHOUT NOVEMBER, NEW VISION WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF STORIES TO HIGHLIGHT KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION. TODAY, JACKY ACHAN FOCUSES ON HIV PREVALENCE IN WOMEN AND GIRLS

A COUPLE HAVING A GOOD TIME. IN UGANDA, APPROXIMATELY 1.2 MILLION PEOPLE AGED BETWEEN 15 AND 64 ARE LIVING WITH HIV ACCORDING TO A RECENT SURVEY

HIV/AIDS is still a burning public health issue worldwide as it the leading cause of death in many countries.

According to World Health Organisation, an estimated 36.7 million people were living with HIV worldwide last year. Of these, about 18.8 million were women and girls.

In Uganda, approximately 1.2 million people aged between 15 and 64 are living with HIV, according to the Uganda Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment, a household-based national survey. The survey was conducted from August 2016 to March 2017 to assess the progress of Uganda's national HIV response.

It puts the prevalence of HIV among females aged 15-64 at 7.6%. The survey further reveals that HIV prevalence is higher among women living in urban areas (9.8%) than those in a rural one (6.7%).

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Global Review Mission to Uganda 2017, says every single hour, two adolescent girls get infected with HIV in Uganda whereas 76 people die of AIDS-related causes every day.

THE ISSUE

Poverty rendering women voiceless

According to the Uganda National Household Survey 2016/17 report released in September, the poverty rate in Uganda is rising. The survey indicates that the number of poor people increased to 10 million in 2016/17 from 6.6 million in 2012/13.

Ssekintuule explains that in cases where a woman or girl lacks the basic needs, they are bound to engage in behaviour, such as seeking financial help from men, which puts them at risk of acquiring HIV.

The man may be HIV-positive and will only offer financial support in exchange for sex, according to Ssekintuule.

Worse still, girls have their first sexual debut early in their teen age, putting them at a high risk of contracting HIV. Watiti states that poverty has pushed many young girls into sex work.

"These young girls come from upcountry to Kampala and must live up to the standards," he says.

According to a report by UN Women, over half of the population world over (mostly women) is unable to decide when they have sex and what tools they use to protect themselves from the negative costs of sexual intercourse, including HIV.

The damning statistics on the prevalence of HIV among women and girls begs the question; what

puts them at higher risk than men?

Anatomy

A woman's genital tract has a wider surface area than a man's.

Dr Stephen Watiti, an HIV/AIDS activist explains that if an HIV-positive man has unprotected sexual intercourse with a woman, he will deposit a considerable amount of

They need to have nice clothes, shoes and food. And to get these things they have to get into relationships with older men, which puts them at risk of getting HIV.

Dr Stephen Watiti, an HIV/AIDS activist explains that by 14, many young girls will have already engaged in sex having been introduced to it by peers or people older than them. Watiti explains that age also makes it difficult for a girl to negotiate for safe sex. "Can you imagine a young girl negotiating with a man fit to be her father or grandfather for safe sex?" he says. He will just dictate terms after all he is the one providing for her and will eventually expose her to HIV," he says.

Ssekintuule adds that some single mothers do not have enough resources to take care of their children. "Therefore, when a man comes around and is willing to help, they will give in to their sex demands and risk getting HIV," she says.

areas. According to Watiti, safe male circumcision further reduces the surface area exposed to the sexual fluids and hence HIV.

The difference in risk of infection boils down to the quantity of infected fluids coming into contact with mucous membranes, in addition to other factors such as viral strain and load.

Male to female transmission is approximately two to eight times more efficient than female-to-male infection.

Josephine Ssekintuule, a registered midwife and social worker at Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative in Kampala, explains further why it is easier for a man to infect a woman with HIV than vice versa.

She says women are likely to acquire HIV during sex through bruising or internal soft tissue damage.

"When it comes to sex it is the man who decides what to do and the woman is never prepared enough for the act. During intercourse there are bruises occur as a result of friction, which happens when a woman is not prepared for intimacy, thus not well-lubricated. The bruises and cracks may also result into ulcers that easily expose the woman to HIV," she explains.

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