



PRESS RELEASE

Violence against women increases their risk for HIV infection

16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence

25th November 2004 – Civil society organizations throughout the region commemorate the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence from 25th November to 10th December this year.

Girls and women are bearing the brunt of the pandemic in Africa. Out of the 23 million people infected adults in Sub-Saharan Africa, 57 percent are women. Women are disproportionately affected by the disease. "Ten years ago, women were at the periphery of the epidemic. Today, they are at its epicenter," Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of UNIFEM, said.

"Violence against women and girls is one of the primary reasons for high female infection rates," said Lori Michau, Co-Director of Raising Voices. Violence such as rape, sexual assault, coercion and intimate partner or domestic violence is rooted in gender inequality and women's low status in relationships and the larger society.

Recent studies have shown that women in violent relationships are more likely to be infected with the virus. Furthermore, the number of young married women ages 15 - 24 in Sub-Saharan Africa infected outweighs their unmarried counterparts.

Yet the mainstream ABC approach to HIV prevention critically ignores women's experiences and context. Many experts believe this has fueled the epidemic. The lack of a gendered response to common HIV prevention strategies has resulted in the death of millions of girls and women.

Increasingly, NGOs and policy makers are recognizing the need to move beyond this approach toward more transformative programs that are grounded in the community and seek to challenge and change attitudes and behaviors that lie at the heart of high infection rates for girls and women: gender inequity.

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The GBV Prevention Network has over 120 member organizations working in the Horn, East and Southern Africa to prevent violence against women and girls. For more information visit www.preventgbvafrica.org