



Questions and Answers (Gender)

Q. Are men or women more affected?

A. Today there are an equal amount of men and women living with HIV/AIDS around the world. However, previously men took up a greater percentage than women. In the last decade women have become increasing effected and affected and many more women are becoming newly infected than men are: Women went from 35% to 48% of adults living with HIV/AIDS and young women currently account for 60% of 15-24 year-olds living with HIV/AIDS, in Sub Saharan Africa women account for 59% of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Q. Are women more at risk in sexual encounters?

A. Yes. Biologically women have a higher probability of being infected by a partner who is carrying HIV than a man being infected from a partner who carries HIV. Women have a greater mucosal membrane surface area when compared to men and are also the receptive partner; this puts women at a greater risk biologically for HIV transmission.

Q. What about social inequalities?

A. Although social inequality may seem like a different topic, it directly relates to the massive increase in women becoming HIV-positive. Women who are dependant upon men economically and culturally have little control over their own bodies as well as lack options for negotiation during sexual encounters. The UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa has said that gender inequality and the inability of women to negotiate safer sex are the main driving factors behind the pandemic.

Q. Are there other factors putting women at risk?

A. Yes. In the developing world women often need blood transfusions and/or medical attention; these interactions may be a route of transmission. This is becoming less common today. Women are also effected and affected in other ways. Economical dependence upon men leaves women lacking skills and experiences, sometimes even the ability, to join the workforce. This creates a poverty driven cycle of commercial sex trade. Young girls are drawn to older men with material good and/or money, passing the virus from men to young women.

Q. Women are the core of families, what happens when they are sick?

A. Mothers are the primary care takers of families. Generally, when a spouse becomes sick the burden rests upon the female head of the family. Previous income of the family is lost and children help at home instead of attending school, that is until the mother becomes sick. At this point children become orphans, many times left to head their own households. Today there are over 14 million orphans due to HIV/AIDS deaths. In order to reverse this trend we need to alter our behaviors, know our own status, and educate others about HIV.