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Women and HIV/AIDS

Women are differently, and often disproportionately, affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This week's edition of HIV/AIDS Today examines the factors that contribute to this pattern.

GLOBAL HIV/AIDS PREVALENCE AMONG WOMEN

In 2007, 15.4 million women worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS.ⁱ By region, the highest percentage of women living with the virus occurs in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 61% of the infected adults are women. The lowest percentage is in Latin America, where 26% of the HIV-positive adults are women. Globally, half of all infected adults are women.ⁱⁱ

WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY TO HIV/AIDS

Biologically, a female is about twice as likely as a male to contract HIV from an infected partner during unprotected heterosexual intercourse. Young women may be especially susceptible because their genital tract tissue is less mature and thus more vulnerable to infection.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sexual violence increases women's susceptibility to HIV infection. This is a particular problem in some developing countries, where as many as half of women

experience sexual violence in their lifetimes.^{iv} In addition to constituting unwanted and usually unprotected sexual exposure, physical trauma to tissues can make HIV transmission even more likely.^v



Source: <http://www.pepfar.gov>

Economic and social dependence on men often limit women's ability to refuse sex or to negotiate the use of condoms. Barriers to education and employment opportunities encourage many

women to sell or barter sex for survival.^{vi}

CARE FOR WOMEN WITH HIV/AIDS

Women's access to care and support for HIV/AIDS is often delayed and limited. When a husband or father dies or becomes sick with HIV/AIDS within a family, the burden of care most often falls on females. Women and girls are most likely to have to drop out of work or school as a result. Moreover, women's lack of inheritance rights in some societies leads to lost homes and land when male family members die.^{vii}

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and World Health Organization (WHO), *2007 AIDS Epidemic Update* (Dec. 2007) (online at http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf).

ⁱⁱ *Id.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *2007 AIDS Epidemic Update, supra note 1.*

^{iv} World Health Organization, *WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses* (2005) (online at http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/Introduction-Chapter1-Chapter2.pdf).

^v *Id.*

^{vi} *Id.*

^{vii} *Id.*