

Gender-specific Aspects of the Burden of HIV/AIDS in South Africa

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Gender is especially relevant for women in Africa as it means inequality and discrimination also with regard to health. In South Africa's poor communities as in developing countries generally it is primary and increasingly women who bear the brunt of the AIDS epidemic. 55% of HIV positive adults in the developing world are women- for every 10 infected men there are 12-13 infected women. Women have low status and little power in society - with the result that they have great difficulty negotiating relationships or condom use. There are recent reports of increasing deaths from AIDS especially among young women in Africa. The higher the prevalence in a country the higher the percentage of HIV positive women.. In SA the total infection rate among women is estimated at 35% compared to 29% among men with women becoming infected at considerably earlier ages than men. A unique feature in South Africa is the early onset of infection among women. A study from a small mining town shows an alarming high HIV prevalence in adolescent girls reaching 60 % at the age of 25. In the HIV/AIDS epidemic women also often carry the triple burden of being sick, being the caregiver for ill family members as well as having the responsibility as the main breadwinner.