



Women and HIV/AIDS

"Violations of women's and girls' human rights have a direct impact on HIV infection. Violence against women and girls, poverty, lack of education and housing, and lack of property rights, all fuel HIV/AIDS infection rates among women and girls. HIV positive women's human rights are also regularly violated."

-Louise Binder Lawyer, HIV/AIDS Activist, and person living with HIV/AIDS

Introduction

Infection rates for women in Canada are on the rise. Many factors influence the rates of infection for women in Canada including gender inequalities and power imbalances in some relationships that cause women to contract HIV either from a promiscuous partner or a partner that will not comply with safe sex practices. Another factor involves women's biological makeup which makes her more vulnerable to HIV contraction during unprotected sex. In order to combat climbing rates of infection Canada needs to more adequately address gender inequality and have accessible education and healthcare specifically for women.

Statistics

Statistics from the Public Health Agency of Canada www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php

- In Canada, a total of 1,866 AIDS cases and 9,569 positive HIV tests were reported in adult women up to December 31, 2006.
- Women represent an increasing proportion of those with positive HIV test reports in Canada and in 2006 accounted for 27.8% of such reports.
- Heterosexual contact and injection drug use are the two main risk factors for HIV infection in women.
- The changing face of HIV/AIDS in Canada necessitates that data on the trends, risk factors, and geographic differences in HIV/AIDS in Canadian women should be used to develop and target gender-specific prevention and care initiatives and programs.
- In the absence of any intervention, an estimated 15% to 30% of women with HIV infection will transmit the infection during pregnancy and delivery, and 10% to 20% through breast milk, to their newborn child.
- The HIV prevalence rate among pregnant women in Canada between 1994 and 2006 ranged from approximately 2 per 10,000 to 9 per 10,000.
- The use of antiretroviral therapy by HIV-positive pregnant women is increasing. Antiretroviral therapy is effective in reducing the risk of mother-to child transmission of HIV.

Reflections

These words are the beginning of a collection that will continue to grow and will value the lived experiences of those living with HIV/AIDS in York Region.

He is so loving and charming. The spark I have been waiting for all my life. Every time something happens around us, our response is so in sync. We were meant to be together. He has often told me that all he wants from me is love and honesty. What he doesn't realise is that to me honesty is a matter of life right here with my beloved kids or life behind some dark prison walls?

Yeh, love I can give without a flinch, the irony is that it was love that got me into this mess. Honesty would mean surrendering who I have become since knowing the wrath that runs through my veins, lives in all my organs and continues to survive as long as I do.

So how do I tell him I am HIV positive? At what point do I begin this conversation? When it comes to disclosure, I seem to lose all my wit.

Ok, so maybe I tell him about my status and then educate him, or is it the other way around? You see, when I became a woman my mother taught me about being a great submissive wife - never about sharing such a secret. Every time I disclose I feel like I am peeling off a layer of my identity leaving me exposed for the world to judge, mock and of course, shun.

I choose to disclose. The one I love has now become my enemy. Now I lay here alone for my love is gone. - Anonymous

Resources

The AIDS Committee of York Region

*Coming soon a new Women's Health Promotion and Community Development Program

www.acyr.org

Voices of Positive Women

www.vopw.org

Women's Health in Women's Hands

www.whiwh.com

Mother Risk at Sick Kids Hospital

<http://www.motherisk.org/women/index.jsp>