

# AIDS Becoming a Women's Disease, Says UN Commission

by Mithre J. Sandrasagra

AIDS is becoming a women's disease, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) declared at the conclusion of two weeks of meetings held in March 2001.

Highlighting that "women are at the epicentre of the epidemic," the CSW urged all governments to take all necessary measures to empower women, strengthen their economic independence, and protect and promote their human rights and fundamental freedoms in order to allow them to better protect themselves from HIV/AIDS.

"The pandemic requires the transforming of relations between women and men to eliminate gender inequality and reduce the risk of infection," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said.

The right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex is often violated since HIV/AIDS stigmatises women and men in gender-specific ways.

Seventy percent of world-wide infection occurs through unprotected sexual intercourse, according to Annan's 2001 report on HIV/AIDS and gender discrimination.

This makes women and girls particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS in-

continued on page 6...AIDS

**Table: Countries with the highest number of people living with HIV in the Asia-Pacific region**

Country	Adults (15-49)	Women (15-49)	Children (0-14)
<i>Global Total</i>	<i>33,000,000</i>	<i>15,700,000</i>	<i>1,300,000</i>
India	3,500,000	1,300,000	160,000
USA	840,000	170,000	10,000
Thailand	740,000	305,000	13,900
Myanmar	510,000	180,000	14,000
China	500,000	61,000	4,800
Cambodia	210,000	71,000	5,400
France	130,000	35,000	1,000
Russia	130,000	32,500	1,800
Viet Nam	99,000	20,000	2,500
Pakistan	73,000	15,000	1,600
Indonesia	52,000	13,000	680
Malaysia	48,000	4,800	550
Nepal	33,000	10,000	930
UK	30,000	6,700	500
Philippines	26,000	11,000	1,300
Netherlands	15,000	3,000	100
Australia	14,000	900	140
Bangladesh	13,000	1,900	130
Japan	10,000	1,300	<100
Sri Lanka	7,300	2,200	200
Papua New Guinea	5,200	2,600	220
Singapore	3,900	790	<100
Rep. of Korea	3,800	490	<100
Kazakstan	3,500	<100	<100
Turkey	2,500	...	...
Lao PDR	1,300	650	<100
New Zealand	1,200	180	<100

Source: Report on the Global HIV/AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS, June 2000

continued from page 5, AIDS...

fection owing to their biological condition as well as economic and social inequalities and culturally accepted gender roles which leave them in a subordinate position to men with respect to decisions concerning sexual relations, the report said.

"Women are not born vulnerable, but made vulnerable," Dubravka Simonovic, Chair of the CSW said.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is growing with alarming speed. Estimates indicate that by December 2000, 36.1 million people were living with HIV, up from 10 million in 1990. Ninety-five percent of those infected live in developing countries.

"Poverty is a major factor responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS, particularly among women who constitute the majority of the world's poor," Simonovic emphasised.

In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, women now account for 55 percent of the total number of people living with the virus. By the end of 2000, an estimated 10.9 million men and 13.3 million women in Africa were living with HIV/AIDS, according to the Secretary-General's report.

Meanwhile, in Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (UNESCAP) reports that more than 2.2 million women aged 15-49 are already living with HIV/AIDS.

Source: Inter Press Service, 16 March 2001

## Happiness is a Powerful Medicine

WASHINGTON—Feeling happy and hopeful appears to be a powerful medicine in reducing the risk of stroke, researchers said. The link between depression and a heightened risk of stroke had already been established in several studies on the impact of psychological factors on stroke incidence.

But researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch investigated the impact of positive emotions on the risk of suffering a stroke—the third leading cause of death in most developed countries, including the United States.

Their study, published in the journal *Psychosomatic Medicine*, followed 2,478 people aged 65 and older for six years. The researchers found that the risk of stroke was significantly reduced in subjects scoring highly in emotional well-being—such as feelings of happiness and hopefulness—while risk increased for subjects who were depressed.

A stroke involves loss of brain functions caused by a loss of blood circulation in some areas of the brain.

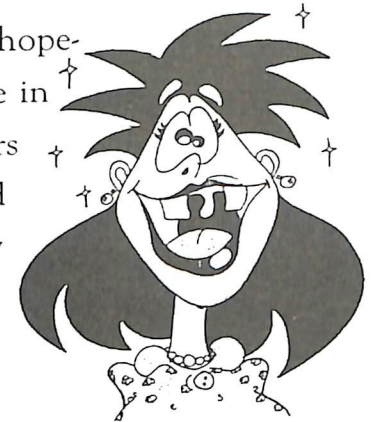
"Positive affect (emotion) is related to a number of characteristics known to improve health or

to protect against chronic disease," Glenn Ostir, who led the study, said in a statement. "Individuals who report high levels of positive affect may be more likely to exercise, to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to adhere to medical therapy."

Researchers said subjects who scored highly on questionnaires for emotional well-being had a stroke incidence that was one-third that of subjects who scored zero. They added that people scoring highly for depressive symptoms experienced only fractional increases in stroke incidence above those with little or no sign of negative affect.

The reduction in stroke risk associated with emotional well-being was more pronounced in men than women and in whites than blacks, the study found.

Source: Reuters, *Manila Bulletin* (Sunday Leisure), 25 March 2001



Marilyn Barcelonajis International-Mania