

## **CHILDREN AND WOMEN VULNERABLE TO HIV**

Children's vulnerability to HIV is closely linked to the situation of women and HIV. The increasing feminisation of HIV in Malaysia adds a complex dimension to the epidemic, raising questions about how children are affected when women – who play important roles in the family and society – become infected and suffer from stigma and discrimination.

### Female drug users

- In 2006, 13,058 new drug users were detected by National Anti-Drug Agency, of which 300 (2%) were female.
- Most recent data on HIV prevalence among female IDUs is from 2002, where 64% of women with HIV acquired HIV through heterosexual transmission; and 20% acquired through injecting drug use.
- Study from 2007 found that drug use and sharing of needles was prevalent among female sex workers.

### Housewives and heads of households

- In 2004, 44% of all women reported with HIV were housewives, many of whom are married monogamous women who acquire the infection from their spouses.
- From 2003-2007, almost five times the number of housewives acquired HIV compared to that of sex workers.

### Pregnant mothers

- In 2006, out of 3 million pregnant women, 1,045 mothers (0.035%) were detected with HIV, through the Ministry of Health's antenatal HIV testing program.
- Screening results from the antenatal HIV testing program suggest that heterosexual transmission is the main cause of infection among HIV-infected pregnant mothers – and married women are increasingly being infected by husbands who practise risky behaviour.

### Sex workers

- As of end 2007, 482 female sex workers were detected with HIV.
- A HIV prevalence study in 2000 indicated that the HIV prevalence rate among sex workers was 11.5%.
- Unprotected sexual intercourse with clients or partners appears to be the main form of transmission.

### Young people

- Almost 37% (29,859) of all people living with HIV in Malaysia are below the age of 29 years.
- Judging by the incidence of other sexually transmitted infections, where the majority of cases were female, it is suggested that young women and girls in Malaysia are much more vulnerable to HIV.

### Refugees

- In late 2007, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia registered 37,938 persons of concern, of which 138 were living with HIV and AIDS.
- The daily circumstances faced by women and girls in the refugee community make them vulnerable to contracting HIV infection and spreading it – including cramped living conditions with males and females, the threat of sexual violence, the need to sell sex for money and favours, and the loss of male family members to disease.

Source: *Women and Girls Confronting HIV and AIDS in Malaysia*, Ministry of Health Malaysia and UNICEF, 2008.