



### Are women at equal risk of being infected with HIV?

Women are, in fact, more at risk of getting infected because of their increased vulnerability. In addition, their low status within the family and society further heighten their vulnerability to infection. It is therefore most important that every woman has access to information about HIV/AIDS to protect herself.

### How does a mother transmit HIV to her unborn child?

An HIV-infected mother can infect her child in her womb during constant exchange of her blood. The baby is more at risk if the mother has been recently infected or is in a later stage of AIDS. Transmission can also occur at the time of birth when the baby is exposed to the mother's blood and to some extent transmission can occur through breast milk. Transmission from an infected mother to her baby occurs in about 30 per cent of cases.

### Is there any risk of infection if one is physically exposed with an HIV infected person?

There are no risks involved. One may share the same telephone with other people in office or work side by

Injectible drugs are highly popular among young men who find solace in them from unemployment and social isolation.

### Is oral sex unsafe?

Oral sex does carry some risk of infection because infected fluids can be transmitted through the mouth especially if there are bleeding gums or tiny sores somewhere in the mouth. The same is true if infected sexual fluids from a woman get into the mouth of her partner. But infection from oral sex alone seems to be very rare.

be shifted to the capital for hospitalisation. He had no support for care and treatment but he died on the train on his way to the capital. This is sad that despite knowing about our problems the government has done, until now, nothing to come to our support."

Akter also explained that private medical practitioners do not want to treat PLWHA. So there is not much choice except for referring a sick PLWHA to our designated hospital for treatment. Akter also observed that donors and many private organisations have contributed for many social development activities but they are not interested in supporting PLWHA. "We badly require financial support to help our members to make a healthy living but due to lack of funds we are unable to do that," Akter said.

Ashar Alo, established in 2000, has been actively engaged in counselling on HIV/AIDS especially to family

members of PLWHA, medical practitioners, community leaders and PLWHA themselves.

She also talked about discrimination of PLWHA saying that the way awareness raising programmes are being carried out is not enough. Innovative and more attractive programmes are needed to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and for this the media must come forward. At the same time the programmes must focus on avoiding discriminating PLWHA which is a major problem in Bangladesh.

Ashar Alo plans to expand in Rajshahi and Khulna this year. It already has branches in Sylhet and Chittagong.

*Naimul Haq, senior reporter of The Daily Star, has had wide experience on HIV/AIDS attending special training programmes, workshops, and conferences and has been awarded several prestigious fellowships abroad.*