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Aids battle continues

High number of victims in the province

SIHLE MAKHOWANA

ONE in five people globally living with HIV/Aids come from South Africa. This is according to Professor Salim Abdool Karim, director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa).

As World Aids Day is commemorated today, South Africa continues to tackle the epidemic responsible for one million deaths globally each year and 1.8 million new cases reported annually.

A total of 7.2 million people living in South Africa are living with HIV/Aids and 1 000 new infections are reported every day, totalling 400 000 annually.

World Aids Day was founded in 1988. It became the first-ever world health day. From inception, its main purpose was to offer people worldwide an opportunity to unite in the fight against HIV, to show support for people living with the disease and to commemorate the lives of those who died from an Aids-related illness.

As South Africa continues to fight the spread of the epidemic, KwaZulu-Natal is the province with the most number of people living with HIV/Aids.

According to a study Abdool Karim conducted at different municipal districts, girls between the ages of 15 and 22 were most likely to be infected.

"HIV is higher in young girls than it is in young boys. Our research is the basis for our own country's plan on how to deal with HIV," said Abdool Karim.

A study he conducted in 14 schools in the Midlands revealed that one in 100 boys in

Grades 9 and 10 had HIV.

It also revealed that young women were the main group being infected, with 2.6% of girls in similar grades infected.

"The main issue here is how do we get young girls to stop sleeping with older men. Research shows that what contributes to the perpetuation of the disease is early engagement in sex by young girls," said Abdool Karim.

According to the professor, Africa has about 70% of all people living with HIV, with South Africa accounting for 19% of all people living with HIV in the world.

"Every country has reported cases of HIV, meaning the epidemic is everywhere and there is no country without infected

people. It is unfortunate that Africa is the worst affected."

Abdool Karim, whose field of research is microbicides for sexually transmitted diseases, said the research conducted on HIV and Aids had yielded many positive results.

"HIV doesn't affect all countries equally.

"Before the year 2000, availability of treatment in most parts of Africa was unheard of, and many people died because of this," he said.

"We said that this could not continue to happen, we could not sit back and allow people

to die. Therefore measures were made to avail funding for treatment.

"Most of that funding to date comes from countries like the United States and United Kingdom," said Abdool Karim.

Samuel Mkhwanazi, the provincial Health spokesperson, said the KZN Health Department had done "exceptionally well" in raising awareness on the seriousness of the epidemic which continued to claim the lives of thousands in the province.

"We have significantly reduced the percentage of women

who transfer the disease to their newborns during birth and after birth.

"The test-and-treat strategy implemented by Health Minister Aaron Mokoaleli has been very instrumental in identifying new cases and treating them immediately, but treatment is not the solution, we want to eradicate this scourge permanently," said Mkhwanazi.

"We have heightened efforts of awareness this festive season with several campaigns aimed at educating young people since they are the most vulnerable, especially young girls," he said.

"Our research has shown that young women are most likely to get infected as early as 15 years of age.

"The high percentage in young women can be attributed to early engagement in sexual intercourse with older men who overpower them in many ways, one being unprotected sex," he said.

"If we can successfully eradicate HIV and Aids in the province, a lot would change even in the country

since KZN bears the most percentage of people infected and living with the disease," said Mkhwanazi.

He said the department would be intensifying engagements with students from various institutions of higher learning to encourage young men to undergo medical circumcision, which he said reduced chances of getting infected by 60%.



Professor Salim Abdool Karim stands next to a decorated HIV sign at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Nelson Mandela School of Medicine, on the eve of World Aids Day.

PICTURE: MOTSHWARI MOFOKENG

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WHAT'S THE BET!
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Clarence Primary School team wins HIV video award



Itumeleng Maqekoane, Samuel Samamba, Muhammad T Bulbulia and Siphelo Ndlovu. To watch the winning video, log on to www.iol.co.za/dailynews

PICTURE: MOTSHWARI MOFOKENG

SE-ANNE RALL

A TWO-and-a-half minute video depicting how a youngster learnt to live with HIV and how to adapt to life at a new school won a Durban primary school bragging rights recently.

Clarence Primary School beat 60 other entrants to walk away winners in the Excellence in Education Awards in the category of Most Original and Most Powerful Story. The group of eight pupils and their Youth Press Club teacher, Shahnaaz Omarjee, attended an awareness and education conference in Kloof, under the theme of #AidsFreeGen, which inspired them to come up with a storyboard and their own theme, #BlessedWithoutABlessor.

Omarjee said they had to adapt the idea of a blessing for the pupils to understand it at their level.

The pupils then worked on a script, with direction from Omarjee, and filmed the short but powerful video.

"In the video, a young boy goes to a new school. He drops his medical prescription that has his (HIV) status on it and other children see it and start bullying him about it,"

she explained.

By the end of the clip, the children in the video have been educated about the youngster's condition and welcome him into their circle of friends.

"The video and theme tie in because the boy is a victim through his mother's relationship with an older man. The boy is then born with HIV and has to live with the illness," Omarjee said.

She said she was impressed with the pupils' understanding of what was required of them and very pleased with the results.

"We were so excited when we were told that we had made it to the finalists' round with 14 other entrants. We were flown to Johannesburg, which in itself was a great moment because some of the pupils had not been on an aeroplane before. They were thrilled!

"Even if we did not win, just the experience alone was a great one for the pupils. You can just imagine how excited we were to learn that we had won in our category. I am so proud of them," she said.

Clarence's principal, Lyn Breytenbach, said she was proud of the pupils' accomplishment.

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