

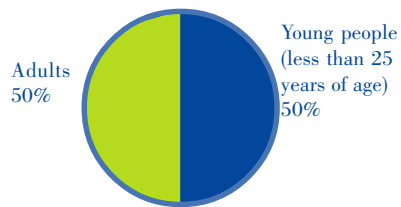
HIV/AIDS and Young People

Why Are Young People at Risk?

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is radically changing the lives of many young people (aged 10-24). In some regions of the world, young people face a greater risk of HIV infection than any other age group. This is due in part to expected gender roles that can contribute to young people's risk of HIV infection (see reverse side), a lack of knowledge regarding how to protect themselves, and a high rate of unprotected sex. Young girls are especially vulnerable to HIV because their immature genital tracts are more likely to tear during sexual activity, creating a higher risk of HIV transmission during unprotected sex. In addition, young women tend to have older, more experienced sexual partners. Such partners often have more control in the relationship and are more likely to have sexually transmitted infections (STIs) due to their previous sexual experiences. Unprotected intercourse with such partners puts young women at risk. At the follow-up meeting to the International Conference on Population and Development (1999) governments were charged with reducing HIV/AIDS infection rates in young people (aged 15-24), with the goal of reducing HIV prevalence by 25%: in the 25 African countries most affected by the pandemic by 2005 and in the rest of the world by 2010.

HIV/AIDS has had a profound affect on young people, especially young women

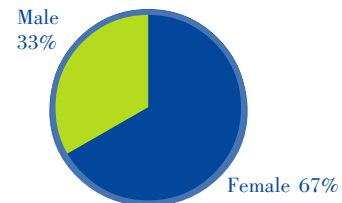
HIV infections thus far



Approximately 50% of all infections thus far have occurred in people younger than age 25.

Source: WHO, *Women and AIDS: Agenda for Action*. Geneva: WHO, 1995.

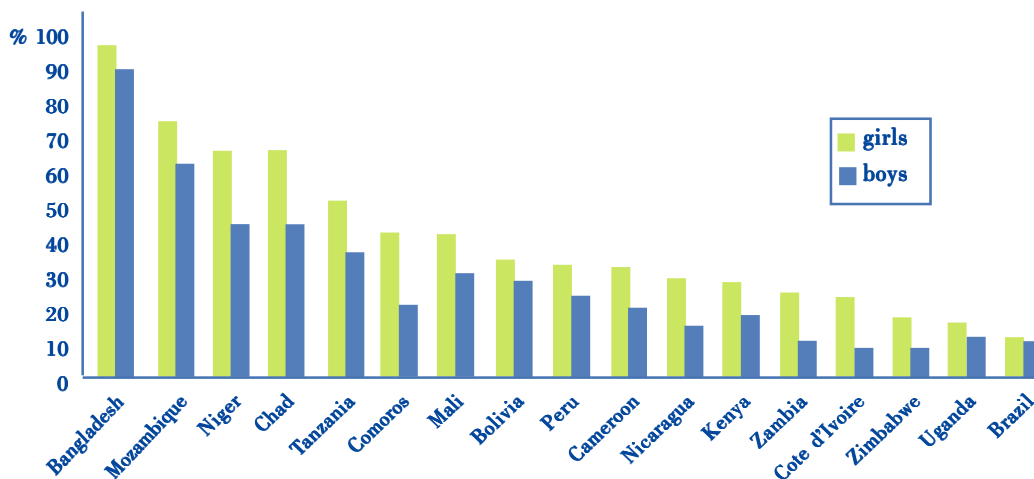
HIV infection among young people



Studies indicate that among newly infected 15-24 year olds in developing countries, females outnumber males two to one.

Source: Weiss, E. et al., *Vulnerability and Opportunity: Adolescents and HIV/AIDS in the Developing World*. Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women, 1996.

Proportion of girls and boys, aged 15-19, who do not know how to protect themselves from HIV, surveys in selected countries, 1994-1998



Source: UNAIDS. *Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic: June 2000*. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2000.

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Every minute 6 people under the age of 25 become HIV+.

Source: BBC. "War footing" urged to fight AIDS. *BBC Online*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 12 July, 2000.

Every day 7,000 young people aged 10-24 become HIV+.

Source: SAIADS. *Youth: A right to sexuality*. (SA/AIDS Fact Sheet). Harare: Southern Africa AIDS Information Dissemination Service, 1999.

Gender roles may influence HIV risk for young people

The following is a list of common gender roles that have been shown to place young women and men at heightened risk for HIV infection.



Sexually Ignorant: Young women and girls are often expected to know little about sex and sexuality. This lack of knowledge puts young women and girls at a heightened risk for HIV infection.

Passive: Young women and girls are often expected to be passive. This gender role may lead to sexual passivity and domination by male partners. This leaves young women with little control over when, where, and how sexual activities occur, including the use of condoms.

Sexually Innocent: Many societies place high value on virginity and sexual inexperience among young, unmarried women. Young women and girls who exhibit sexual and reproductive experience, such as seeking out information and care regarding sexual health matters or knowing how to use a condom, may be viewed as promiscuous.



Sexually Knowledgeable: Young men and boys are often expected to know about sex and sexuality. This expectation of knowledge may deter young men from seeking information about HIV/AIDS for fear of appearing ignorant about sexual matters and therefore unmasculine.

Aggressive: Young men and boys are often expected to pursue numerous sexual partners and to be in control of sexual encounters. Young men and boys who adhere to these aggressive behaviours and engage in unprotected sex may place themselves and their partners at risk.

Sexually Experienced: Young men and boys are often expected to experiment with sex during their adolescent years. In many societies, sexual experience among boys and young men is encouraged by peers and seen as a matter of prestige. Such activities, coupled with unprotected sex, increase risk.