

Alarming rate of HIV/AIDS infection among young women

There is a worrying trend of younger females contracting HIV/AIDS, with the 10-29 and 15-19 age groups accounting for the majority of the increase.

Four times as many young women in these age groups have been reported with AIDS than young men. Concurrently, adult males in the 30-79 age group account for a larger percentage of those contracting the disease.

This was revealed by Minister of Health Dr Fenton Ferguson, speaking yesterday at an open-day symposium to showcase current HIV and AIDS training interventions for health-care workers in the Caribbean, which took place at the University Hospital of the West Indies.

"The demographics of the pandemic's spread in Jamaica has worrying implications, including indications of a growing prevalence of transactional sex among the young female cohort, perhaps related to increasing poverty and factors such as the superstitious belief that sex with a young virgin female will cure the disease," Ferguson stated.

He also revealed that the proportion of male to female AIDS cases has narrowed recently.

In 2010, males accounted for 53.2 per cent of reported cases, while females accounted for 46.8 per cent.

"The gap used to be much higher in favour of males locally," he said.

The minister noted that of concern too was the fact that Jamaica had elements of both a generalised and concentrated HIV epidemic. He stated that the average prevalence in the general population was estimated at 1.6 per cent, but the most recent surveys showed higher HIV infection among at-risk groups, in particular men who have sex with men accounting for 32 per cent, and sex workers, 4.9 per cent.

"It is perhaps instructive that the rate among sex workers has declined from a reported nine per cent in 2005, quite likely reflective of greater success at health education among this grouping," he shared.

He said there was still an issue of under-reporting of the disease, mainly because of the persistent stigma and discrimination associated with the illness.

Source: Jamaica Gleaner