

HIV in the Region: an album

The following are accounts of people who are at risk of contracting HIV or have learnt to live with the truth that they are HIV-positive.

These images and stories tell us of struggles and hopes of people who are looking beyond their HIV infection to make a better life for themselves as well as their family and peers.

Some of the names below have been changed to protect the individuals' identity and respect their privacy.

INDONESIA



Sister Siti Soltief, Jayapura Support Group, Papua
(Nurse, HIV/AIDS activist)

"I want to see the stigma and discrimination decrease and [I want to] make antiretroviral drugs available to more people. The treatment is free which is good, but the care and support aspect is very much forgotten. We should focus more on this."

"I work as a nurse at the general hospital. In 2001, we noticed a lot of discrimination of HIV patients. At the time, a wife who had just lost her husband asked me for help and support for herself and her children who were HIV-positive. There were many non-governmental organizations for tuberculosis but none for HIV. At that time we started to work with the community and set up the Jayapura Support Group. Our volunteers are all nurses from the general hospital. They do this work part-time."

"We have 12 staff here at the shelter and we care for 74 clients. We run meetings for information and education for our clients. Seventeen clients are receiving free antiretroviral treatment from the government through the hospital programme. But, we have no facility for regular CD4 counting."

"There is still a lot of stigma and discrimination towards HIV patients in the hospital. In 2005, a pregnant woman who was HIV-positive came to deliver her baby. The doctors admitted her but when they found out that she was HIV-positive, they complained about not being informed and refused to treat her. They referred her to voluntary counselling and testing and abandoned her."

"Here in Jayapura, the majority of HIV is transmitted sexually. The husbands go to sex workers and the wife is not in a position to refuse sex. It is a difficult situation. The population is still very ignorant about HIV, which is further heightened by their low level of education."



INDONESIA

Daipen (father), Leny (mother) and Novela (child, 23 months old), Jayapura Support Group, Papua

(HIV-positive family)

"When they told us that Novela was HIV-positive, my wife was very sad and afraid. I just thought that it was another disease that we would fight and overcome. We immediately suspected that we might be HIV-positive as well so we got ourselves tested. At that point we were really frightened. After this shock, we don't want anything else. We are just living for Novela."

"We are all HIV-positive: me, my wife and child. My child and I both have TB, too. We live far away from the shelter so it is difficult to come regularly. I am a farmer."

"We have known that we are HIV-positive since February 2005. We found out when we took Novela to the hospital. She was coughing and had fever. The doctor checked her weight and asked us to go and see a counsellor who recommended testing for HIV, but we did not go."

"Novela started treatment for her TB but when many months later there was no improvement, we decided to go for voluntary counselling and testing. Before this we knew nothing about HIV."

"We know how we became infected. A friend of my wife asked her to come to Jayapura and work with her as a sex worker. She did it for only 7 months before we got married. I was one of her clients. We never used condoms and she rarely used them with her other clients. She stopped sex work as soon as we married. I had also been to other sex workers as well."

"At the moment, nobody knows about our status. We are going to keep it that way to protect ourselves and especially Novela."

"We all hope to start antiretroviral treatment soon."

INDIA

Narasimhan (husband), Rajeswari (wife), Tambaram Hospital, ART Clinic, Chennai

(Spouses on antiretroviral treatment)



"Four years ago I had an accident at work and had a blood transfusion. I am sure that I got HIV infection from that as I don't have any bad habits. But I realize that I have infected my wife!"

"We have been at Tambaram Hospital for 10 days now and have started antiretroviral treatment."

"A year ago my wife had fever and we went to consult a private doctor. He tested my wife for HIV. She tested positive. I immediately went for a test, which was also positive. At first, we did not really know what HIV was. Since coming to Tambaram, and with the counselling we received here, we are more aware. We feel very sad that this has happened to us."

"My wife had some stomach pains and had been taking symptomatic treatment for the last 4 months. I have been keeping well. We were paying Rs. 2500 a month for antiretroviral treatment. When we heard that Tambaram was providing free antiretroviral treatment we decided to come here."

"We have two children, a boy and a girl, 18 and 16 years old. We have not told them or our relatives about our HIV infection. We think our children will suffer if we tell them. We don't want to worry them now."

"I have a small business store in my village in Andhra Pradesh, more than 300 km away from here. Now that we are enrolled in the antiretroviral treatment programme, we are receiving free train tickets for our visits to Tambaram. Before, it would cost us Rs. 600 for each visit."

"I am happy that we have been able to get treatment. However, in spite of this, my wife is still sad. We will battle through."

NEPAL



Surender Shah, Vice-President, Nava Kiran Plus (a hospice for people with HIV/AIDS), Kathmandu

(Former injecting drug user, HIV-positive)

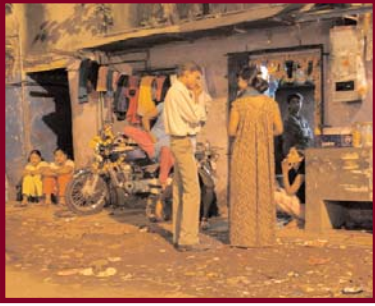
"Why did I start abusing drugs? My dad died when I was 9 years old. I was put in a boarding school where I started with hash and tablets and then moved on to heroin. It was the done thing. All my friends were doing it."

"I was an injecting drug user doing odd jobs, such as driver, tour agent. Seven years ago, I had to have a medical examination for a job. This was when I found out my HIV status. When I went to collect the results of my medical test, they wouldn't give them to me. They said they had to talk to me and counsel me. I didn't want this and just told them to give it to me. If I had it [HIV], then it was up to me to deal with it."

"I went home to my family and in a fit of rage threw the report on the floor. My sister read it and started crying. She and my family were aware of HIV and what it meant. They had seen information on the TV but it was very negative basically saying you are going to die. We were all very depressed at first. Now, my family is very supportive."

"At first after the result, I injected more drugs and was very depressed. After 3 months my family took me to a private hospital. I was diagnosed with tuberculosis, but even there they wouldn't tell me that I was HIV-positive. I stopped the drugs when I went to a drug rehabilitation centre. There I started counselling others and together with a friend set up Nava Kiran Plus to help other HIV-positive people."

NEPAL



Laxmi, Kamithipura, Mumbai

(Sex worker and peer educator)

" I know about HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases. Every three months I go for an HIV test. I am trying to make the best of a difficult situation. I live for my children. They are all I have got left."

"I am a sex worker. My husband died of cancer 6 years ago when we were living in the village 600 km from here. With two children to support, I needed to search for work. I left my children with my parents in the village. A cousin and I came to Mumbai to look for work. This was the only work we could find. When I first came, I was a street worker. Now we live in a brothel."

"I have started acting as peer educator with a non-governmental organization called ASHA about 15 days ago. One day I want to start my own community of peer educators."

"Since I started working with ASHA, I can see clients only in the evenings. But I do want to stop sex work completely. My salary as peer educator doesn't permit this yet. I earn Rs.1500 a month which I supplement with my sex work. I usually end up with about Rs. 4000 a month when I include sex work. I do this work for the education of my son. I have a daughter as well. I see my children 2-3 times a year."

"I always insist on using a condom. 'No condom, no penetrative sex,' I tell my clients. I know about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. ASHA has educated me well. Every three months I go for an HIV test. I can't go back to the village because there is no work there. I am stuck here for the moment. I am trying to make the best of a difficult situation. I am happy with my work. I now live for my children. They are all I have got left."