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Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report

Global Challenges | HIV/AIDS Posing Risks to Economy, Social Development in South Asia, Report Says

[Mar 03, 2009]

Countries in South Asia face serious economic and social development risks from HIV/AIDS, according to a [World Bank](#) report released Friday, the *Times of India* reports. The report, titled "HIV and AIDS in South Asia: An Economic Development Risk," said that even if the overall prevalence of the disease is low, there still could be high and rising prevalence among vulnerable groups, such as commercial sex workers and their clients, and injection drug users and their partners (*Times of India*, 2/28). The report said, "Without increasing prevention interventions among those at highest risk, these concentrated epidemics can further escalate." Sadiq Ahmed, the World Bank's acting chief economist, said the report's analysis "shows that failure to contain the epidemic at low levels may have serious economic consequences."

According to [Asia Pulse/Individual.com](#), the report also said that access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment is linked with socioeconomic factors -- such as gender, education and wealth -- and that people's ability to cope with the financial impact of HIV/AIDS differs significantly. For example, the report says that HIV-positive widows face a disproportionate economic impact because of their HIV-positive and low socioeconomic status.

In addition, failure to contain the epidemic in South Asia could result in high costs related to treatment, the report said, adding that access to effective treatment is "vitaly important to mitigate the health and economic impacts" of HIV/AIDS. The medical costs of treatment can put a significant portion of the HIV-positive population at risk of poverty, "especially in a region where most health services are paid for out of pocket," Asia Pulse/Individual.com reports. The report said that, with the exception of Sri Lanka, 75% or more of health expenditures in South Asia are financed privately and very little are paid for by third-parties like insurance companies.

According to the report, although the effect of HIV/AIDS on countries' overall level of economic activity is small, the impact of direct welfare costs because of increased mortality and lower life expectancy are more considerable. In addition, the economic impact of HIV/AIDS on individual households is substantial, the report found. For example, a household survey in India found that 36% of HIV-positive people who were able to retain employment still reported an average income loss of about 9% (Asia Pulse/Individual.com, 3/2).

Mariam Claeson, the World Bank's HIV/AIDS coordinator for South Asia, said that

there "cannot be any room for complacency," even in countries with low HIV/AIDS prevalence rates. Claeson said that although the impact of HIV/AIDS "on economic growth is small in South Asia, the welfare cost on households is by no means negligible." She added that HIV/AIDS also has an "enormous disproportionate impact on vulnerable and often marginalized people at highest risk of infection, and on poor households with less access to information, preventive services and treatment" (*Times of India*, 2/28).

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