

Extramarital relations spreading HIV/AIDS in Mizoram

Health officials in Mizoram are worried over recent data that points to promiscuous sex among married people as one of the primary reasons behind the spread of HIV/AIDS in the northeastern state.

The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) in a recent report said 554 of the total 1,910 people living with HIV/AIDS in Mizoram were in the age group of 30-39.

'This is not the age group of intravenous drug users and naturally the main mode of transmission could be sex with multiple partners,' said K. Ropari, project director of the Mizoram State Aids Control Society (MSACS).

The NACO report said 1,006 people living with HIV in Mizoram contracted the virus through sexual contact, while 732 people were infected due to intravenous drug use.

'Extramarital affairs could be the main reason behind this high figure. We have to create an awareness drive for condom acceptance,' said C. Lalsangzuala, regional director of Francois Xavier Bagnoud (FXB), a charity mission working to rehabilitate people living with HIV/AIDS.

'It is evident that a wife would not approve her husband carrying a condom in his wallet, but since there is a high chance that the husband indulges in an extramarital affair there is a need for condom acceptance awareness,' he added.

Other healthcare workers in the state echoed similar views.

'Condom acceptance awareness has to be encouraged among married men who are vulnerable to having sex outside marriage. The husband is not only inviting trouble for himself but also putting at risk his wife and other family members,' Chawnglungmuana, medical director of the Society for Lifeline Operation in Mizoram (Shalom), an organisation working for HIV/AIDS patients.

Several healthcare groups have urged the powerful church in the Christian-dominated state to help prevent promiscuity among married people.

'I think we need to take a serious look at our society and the church also has a role to play in educating and counselling married couples,' said Mahlimi Hmar of the Centre for Peace and Development in Aizawl.

Mizoram is listed as the seventh highest HIV/AIDS prevalent state in India with the northeast considered a high-risk zone.

'We may be a high-prevalence state, but we also need to highlight that Mizoram is one of the very few states in India to test blood samples. We have already tested one-third of our total 1.2 million population,' Ropari said.

The Mizoram government has enlisted the support of various social organisations, including the influential Central Young Mizo Association, to spread a massive awareness drive.

'Churches, NGOs and other social organisations are working with us,' Ropari said.

Sangzuala Hmar (© IANS / India eNews)