



Questions and Answers (Social Level)

Q. How does society affect HIV transmission?

A. Society changes the way HIV is transmitted on a social level in many ways. This is one of the reasons certain countries have greater HIV/AIDS prevalence than others. There are many factors, the following is a list in no specific order. (1) Denial – Society and people deny that HIV affects them or their social group, this often leads to placing blame upon others. (2) Education – The inability to access education, lacking education, and misinformation regarding HIV/AIDS leads to a social increase in prevalence (see Myths for more about this). (3) Medical Services – The absence of medical services, such as testing and treatment, or the improper use of medical services, such as transmission through blood transfusions, can increase prevalence. (4) War and Conflict – Social instability often leads to a breaking of social norms and even social chaos. This can lead to sexual violence, as was witnessed during the Rwandan genocide and during the Congolese civil war. The mass movements of military and militias can transport the virus to different locations, an example of this is the peacekeepers that travel all over the world and may engage in the commercial sex trade industry. (5) The mass movement of peoples, which can be associated with conflict as military but also as refugees and migration, has been shown to increase HIV prevalence. This is due to a change in society and normal life as well as the increase of sexual violence during such mass movements of peoples. (6) Socio-economics – Poverty can lead to many high-risk behaviors, such as engaging in commercial sex trade or the exchange of sex for school fees and material goods. Social inequalities also increase HIV prevalence as women receive less education in societies where women have a lower social status. (7) STIs – Sexually transmitted infections are a cofactor for HIV transmission and their prevalence is associated with the prevalence of HIV.

Q. Many of these factors I can't control, am I hopeless?

A. No, you are not hopeless. Let us not move into despair. The social level factors are largely out of the hands of individual people. Aspects like conflict and macro socio-economics are largely not in control of the general population. However, the presence of conflict and/or poverty does not mean people will become HIV positive rather that probabilities and prevalence's increase. In these cases we need to alter our own behaviors to a greater extent so as to prepare for the difficulties that our situation presents us. Other factors like denial are concerns with social ideas and we can all play a part in changing these ideas so as to decrease HIV/AIDS prevalence. STIs can be treated and social inequalities worked against so that we can change the course of this pandemic. Everyday 14,000 people are newly infected with HIV and we all can play a part in reducing that number to create a better future for our community and world.