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Report shows HIV/AIDS sufferers face discrimination

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JOHOR BARU, Sat. - Discrimination against HIV/AIDS sufferers must be eradicated.

A report by the Malaysian AIDS Council, to be released in conjunction with World AIDS Day on Dec 1, will document the experience of Malaysians who suffer discrimination because of the disease.

Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the report was part of a regional project carried out early last year.

The project is supported by the United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS and the Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS.

"The report is proof of discrimination as the authorities do not believe it exists or think it is just a one-off case. They fail to realise that it is very pervasive and should be eliminated," she told reporters after giving a talk on "Women and HIV/AIDS" here today.

The talk, organised by the State Women's Affairs Council (Hawa), was part of the programmes for Johor's Women's Day celebrations. Also present was State Family Development, Women's Affairs and Health Committee chairman Halimah Mohd Sadique.

Marina said women, the usual victims of sexual violence and discrimination, needed to be empowered with knowledge on how to prevent themselves from being exposed to HIV/AIDS.

She said that the risk of women contracting HIV from men was three to four times higher although the blame for transmitting the disease often fell on women.

"We cannot blame women as 90 per cent of those who tested positive for the virus had sexual relations with only their husbands," she said.

She said it was worrying that more women were being infected with HIV and that they were in the 15-24 age group in developing nations.

Halimah said of the 880 new cases of HIV infection recorded in Johor for the first nine months of the year, 60 of them were women.

She said the Johor branch of Hawa would propose to the State Government to set up counselling centres for troubled women and those with HIV/AIDS.

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