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More housewives and children with AIDS

By Anna Maria

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - More housewives and children than sex workers are being infected with HIV and AIDS in Malaysia.

Statistics by the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) revealed that a total of 1,120 housewives and 467 children below 12 were infected with HIV compared to 347 sex workers from 1986 to 2003.

During this period, there were 217 housewives and 134 children infected with AIDS compared to only 43 cases involving sex workers.

Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the alarming revelation required a review of the awareness campaign.

She said the number of awareness campaigns on AIDS carried out in Malaysia was too small and targeted only drug addicts and sex workers.

"We are not sending the right message. People should be made aware there is actually a link between these two high risk groups and the public.

"AIDS can affect everyone. Husbands who had been infected with HIV will infect their wives while drug addicts can transmit the disease to their spouses and babies," she told reporters after a briefing on the DaimlerChrysler Red Ribbon Media Awards 2004.

On a more positive note, the number of HIV cases in the country last year recorded a three per cent drop from 6,978 in 2002 to 6,756.

In the same period, the number of AIDS cases declined by almost 10 per cent from 1,193 to 1,076.

Despite the declining cases, Marina highlighted that the total number of women infected with HIV last year rose by seven per cent from 629 cases to 673 cases as well as the 10 per cent increase in the number of women infected with AIDS from 125 in 2002 to 137.

She said the increasing number of women infected with HIV and AIDS indicated that the disease was no longer confined to the high-risk groups but has started to penetrate mainstream society.

"Twenty years ago, people thought that this was a men's disease. But now it has affected women as well. This is a bad sign.

"We need more programmes for women, especially housewives, not only to create awareness of AIDS but also to address the issue."

In conjunction with this, Marina urged all sectors to work together to help address issues on AIDS.

"This is not solely a responsibility of the Health Ministry.

"What we need right now is a national strategic plan so that all ministries can work together in addressing the AIDS problem in the country."

The Red Ribbon Media Award, which was introduced in 1996, is a biennial event organised by MAC to recognise and honour the role played by local media practitioners who have contributed towards educating the public about HIV and AIDS.

Among the past winners were New Straits Times for print category, Asian-Family.com for web-based talk show category and Q-Plex Communications for Broadcast TV drama category.

For the coming event, Marina hoped to see more entries, especially from Chinese and Tamil newspapers to help spread the awareness of HIV and AIDS to a wider group of people.

Meanwhile, DaimlerChrysler Malaysia has agreed to be the principal sponsor of the Red Ribbon Media Award for the next three series.

Coming in with a RM250,000 sponsorship, DaimlerChrysler Malaysia

president and chief executive officer Frank Steinleitner viewed its participation in the event as a moral duty and commitment in contributing to the local society.

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