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When wives can say no to sex

Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Wives have the right to refuse sex if they know that their husbands may infect them with HIV, said Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil today.

Shahrizat said her ministry was organising programmes to educate wives about their right to refuse sex, and their husbands had to accept and respect the decision.

"There have been cases of wives being forced to have sex with their husbands although they realise they run the risk of being infected with HIV.

"We are working hard to change this and we hope all quarters, especially non-governmental organisations and women's groups, will assist us," said Shahrizat said after launching "Project Iceberg 2 - Message of Love and Hope."

The programme is organised by Wanita MCA with the co-operation of the Malaysian AIDS Council and Kuala Lumpur AIDS Support Services (KLASS) Society, It is aimed at creating public awareness and understanding of HIV/AIDS among the Chinese.

Present were Wanita MCA head and Deputy Finance Minister II Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen and Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

Marina said religious leaders should support the proposal to educate wives.

"Women are not considered as being in the high risk group but they are subjected to AIDS by various means, including contracting it from their husbands.

"The problem is that our culture does not allow wives to say no to sex and this ought to change. The ministry must champion this, and it must be supported by all."

Earlier, Shahrizat said information from the Health Ministry showed that three new AIDS cases were reported daily last year.

"The reported number of HIV infections among women has increased by 35 per cent from 2001 to last year. This is a cause for worry," she said.

The ministry is willing to provide funds for the Malaysian AIDS Council to publish booklets in Tamil and Mandarin on AIDS, she said.