

Katya Burns

Russia's Epidemic Generalizes: HIV/AIDS Among Women and Problems of Access to HIV Services in the Russian Regions

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Abstract

Russia's HIV/AIDS epidemic is generalizing: Infection is moving out of high-risk groups—in Russia's case, predominantly injecting drug users or IDUs—to invade the general population. Rising female infection rates signal the onset of a generalized epidemic in Russia. Throughout the 1990s, the bulk of HIV infection occurred among young men who contracted the virus by sharing contaminated needles which they used to inject heroine. At the turn of the millennium, men accounted for 80 percent of HIV infections in Russia, and 95.6 percent of HIV infections were contracted via contaminated injecting equipment. All that has changed. In 2005, 43 percent of new infections occurred among women of reproductive age and women made up 70 percent of those Russians infected via sexual transmission; at the same time, infection via needle sharing in Russia dropped to 66 percent. The trend is evident: Young women in their child-bearing years are increasingly becoming infected through sexual contact. Whether or not Russia addresses HIV vulnerabilities among this group of women, therefore, spells the difference between generalized epidemiological disaster and stabilization of the epidemic.

Figures, respectively, from UNAIDS and TransAtlantic Partners Against Aids, HIV/AIDS, Law and Human Rights: A Handbook for Russian Legislators, Moscow, 2005, p. 41; and Country Report of the Russian Federation On the Implementation of the Declaration on Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the 26 th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in June 2001, Reporting period: January-December 2005, p.6.