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South Africa

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Many women in South Africa have little control over their sexual lives, and Bolton said they "are often not in a position to negotiate sexual behavior and things like the use of condoms."

The research unit gives out more than 3,000 condoms a month as it seeks to empower and educate South African women in ways to prevent the spread of HIV. The government, as part of an intensive awareness and education program, buys nearly 400 million condoms a year and distributes them throughout the country.

The message appears to be getting across. A recent study by the Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation, known as CADRE, sounded a rare optimistic note, concluding that condom use is widespread and endorsed by all age groups, with "impressive levels" being reached by those younger than 25.

Life expectancy drops

The HIV/AIDS numbers are staggering. An estimated 1,650 people contract HIV daily. About 2.65 million women and 2.09 million men ages 15 to 49 are infected. Life expectancy has dropped from 59 years to 49 years. By 2010, the disease will have killed 5 million to 7 million South Africans.

Another chilling trend is the soaring number of rapes, some rumored to be prompted by the myth that sex with a virgin can cure AIDS. One of the latest victims was a 5-month-old girl who later died from extensive wounds.

According to Interpol, there were more than 52,000 rape cases in South Africa in 2000 - 40 percent involving victims younger than 18. In the first half of 2001, 20 percent of the victims were

younger than 11.

At the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, where free condoms are in all restrooms, the ambassador, Cameron R. Hume, anguishes about whether the HIV/AIDS epidemic will derail South Africa's chances of becoming the continent's most successful democracy.

"South Africa has good financial systems, natural resources, tourism, good macroeconomic policy and a good infrastructure," Hume said before listing problems such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, troubled schools, soaring crime and corruption.

But he predicted very serious consequences if the country does not succeed in its struggle with AIDS.

If South Africa, with its strong connections to the global economy, does not succeed, "the lights will go out all over Africa," Hume said.

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Women rest in the AIDS ward at the Missionaries of Charity hospice in Lusaka, Zambia. The hospice treats 80 women who are HIV positive and 85 men. Eighty orphans live at the center.

HIV

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ing the person feel comfortable, said University senior Anna Ciesielski, who volunteers for the organization.

Every Monday from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., staff from Lane County Public Health Department come to the organization to provide HIV testing for the general public.

On Tuesdays from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., HIV Alliance staff provide testing for the local lesbian, gay and bisexual population specifically, although no one is ever turned away. Also, the staff often provides testing by appointment.

Staff members sometimes provide a variety of incentives to get people interested in being tested, such as a small cash allotment or a 9.5-ounce bottle of flavored, water-based lube.

These incentives can set people at ease in addition to inspiring them to

come in; however, it sometimes can be hard to calm people's fears.

"I think my anxiety and fear is about death and a loss of freedom," said University student Michael Eaves, a women's studies major who volunteers for the organization and gets tested there every three months.

Eaves said if he ever tested positive, he would be most afraid of telling his mother because he would not want to hurt her.

"She's always had that pervasive mentality that she doesn't want her children to die before she does," he said.

Because the issue can be so delicate, providing a safe, relaxing space requires the tester to employ a balance of gentle consideration and pragmatic language, especially if the tester has to tell someone he or she is HIV-positive or has AIDS.

While it is never easy to tell someone that they have tested positive for HIV infection, there are some ways that are more effective, such as remaining clear and direct, said men's outreach director Curtis Borloglou-Boyd, who has worked and volunteered at HIV Alliance for almost five years.

There are also different ways that people react, depending on the situation, Borloglou-Boyd said.

"Sometimes people, when they get this kind of news, they're in a bit of shock," he said. "They may just want to absorb it and go home."

"It's not a death sentence, but the other thing is, it's not a walk in the park," he added. "You're not going to have the life you had before."

Contact the reporter at jillindaley@dailyemerald.com.

Today's crossword solution

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