

## *The Fight Against HIV AIDS*



Two women employees learn from Helen and about HIV AIDS transmission

By degrees, step by step, the inevitable has come to Papua New Guinea. It is now estimated that 2% of the population of 5 million has HIV AIDS. This is not an unexpected result given the lifestyles that we can see in the villages, towns and cities of PNG.

SIL has great opportunities to help the country at the village level. Unlike many of the outside aid agencies producing materials targeted to the urban (and more educated) populations, we have workers stationed around the country, living and working in many of the 800+ languages in PNG. Earlier we wrote about the video we produced. This has now been translated and dubbed into a local language: Agarabe. A few weeks ago this was shown throughout the language group and well received. We hope

that other language groups will use this video along with some books we have designed to be translated into various languages.

Recently Helen and others from the AIDS task force gave a two-part seminar to our 300 employees here. The first day everyone was together. On the second day, there were two groups; one targeted to the men, and another for women. Among the many things to discuss were related lifestyle behavioral changes. Helen and others addressed some common myths to the transmission of HIV AIDS. Here is a sampling of what people believe here:

### Myths about getting HIV:

- You can get it from a mosquito bite.
- You can get it by living with or caring for someone with HIV.
- You can get it from handling money or in a toilet or on the bus.
- HIV is spread through witchcraft, sorcery and other spiritual means.
- HIV only comes from having sexual relations with a prostitute (any other woman is fine).
- You can tell by looking at someone that they do or do not have HIV infection and just avoid sex with someone who looks infected.

### Myths about how one can cure an infection

- By having sex with a virgin (very dangerous in a male dominated society).
- By drinking any sort of magic water (charlatans make lots of money here).
- By praying to or looking at any particular idol. Or by looking upon or touching any item associated with a holy person.
- By taking a few pills or receiving a shot.

### Other myths related to HIV

- PNG men are different from other men sexually.
- If a PNG man or any man does not have sex for a long period of time they will burst.
- Removing all the HIV positive people from a population will prevent HIV infection.

A key target audience turns out to be the male population. If we can somehow figure out a way to connect with the men, and actually create overall behavioral changes, then we will greatly succeed in lowering the transmission rate of this disease as well as many other STI's. There are exceptions, but for the most part women in this society are not the problem segment.



Helen at our large assembly house speaking to SIL employees



A special chat with just the women.  
No men allowed !!

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In May, Helen presented the PNG Branch HIV AIDS Task Force to the Pacific Forum of Bible Agencies (PFOBA) meeting, held at Alexandra Headlands, north of Brisbane, Australia. (I went to other meetings and we did a short holiday at that time as well). Helen also works with a group of Bible Agencies in the South Pacific to help refine and develop useful awareness materials. She is concentrating right now on men and their roles in the community and family in relation to the AIDS epidemic in the Pacific.

**Prayer:** SIL is planning yet another awareness seminar. This time to allow our SIL members to be more effective in communicating issues at the village

level. Pray that Helen's preparations and delivery would go very smoothly this September the 19th.

Pray that all agencies in this country would be effective in their campaigns to affect behavioral changes in this society. The future of this country depends upon this. With great pleasure and with thanksgiving to God,

*Brian C.* And for Helen



Helen talks with Dr. Greg Law and SIL  
Director Brian Hodgkin at PFOBA

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