

Stigma Continues To Ruin Lives Even Though Figures Show Decline In HIV Cases Across The Country

# SHUNNED BY FAMILY, sheltered by stranger

Vijay Singh | TNN

“Where were all the villagers when we were thrown out of our own house? Why did no one come forward to help us?”  
One of the widows

Even today, AIDS is considered to be a curse in rural areas. Those with the disease are treated like leprosy patients used to be in earlier times  
Pandurang Kurade

Government needs to create more awareness about AIDS in rural areas so that people are more sensitive and humane towards those suffering from it

Shekhar Samant |  
A LOCAL SCRIBE WHO HIGHLIGHTED THE PLIGHT OF THE WIDOWS AND THEIR KIDS

“We contracted the disease from our husbands, so how can we be blamed for it,” asked Meena whose 14-year-old son is HIV positive.

The widows, who were shunned by their own family, were adopted by the poultry farm owner, Pandurang Kurade (54), whom they respectfully call ‘baba’ (father).

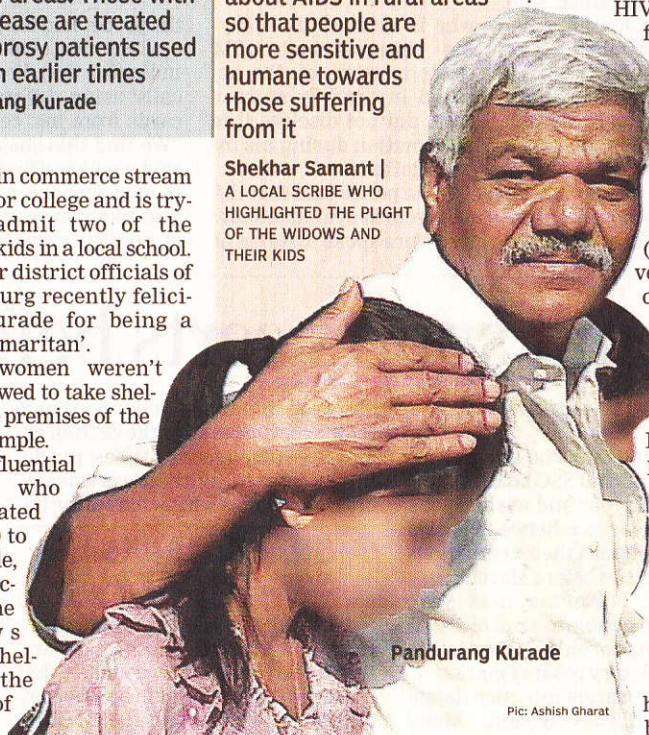
Kurade thanks the local media for highlighting the plight of the widows and their children. “On October 25, I saw a photograph of the family sleeping on a dusty road in a regional newspaper. I was shocked to learn that none of the villagers had come forward to rehabilitate them and decided to adopt them,” said Kurade. He has secured admission for two of

the girls in commerce stream of a junior college and is trying to admit two of the younger kids in a local school.

Senior district officials of Sindhudurg recently felicitated Kurade for being a ‘Good Samaritan’.

The women weren’t even allowed to take shelter on the premises of the village temple.

An influential villager, who had donated Rs 51,000 to the temple, took objection to the widows taking shelter in the house of the gods.



Pandurang Kurade

Pic: Ashish Gharat

Mumbai: The Mumbai District Aids Control Society (MDACS) is relieved about the sharp fall in the incidence of

HIV but admits that a few vulnerable pockets continue to be there. This is because the incidence of HIV in high-risk groups like migrants, men having sex with men (MSM) and intravenous drug users continues to be an inconsistently rising trend.

Estimates indicate that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in MSM population has not remained consistent over the years. While the numbers have definitely come down from a 24% incidence in 2000 to at least half of that, the graph has been hovering between 6% and

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

## Some high-risk groups still a cause for concern

### FIGURING IT OUT

HIV prevalence in high risk groups (in percentage)

Groups	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008-09
IDU	39.42	15.60	28	12.80	20.40	24.20	20
MSM	16.80	18.40	9.60	6.01	7.60	8.60	9.20
Transgender	00	00	49.25	43.90	29.60	42	16.40
FSW (brothel based)	54.50	54.28	44.76	50.20	36.80	42.40	26.30

IDU- intravenous drug users MSM- Men having sex with men  
FSW-female sex workers

10% every year. For instance, it had gone down to 6% in 2005 but spiralled to 7.6%, 8.6% and 9.2% in the following three years.

Estimates with the state government suggest that despite all efforts, the HIV status of only 39,572 MSM is known. Of this, appropriate medical care and prevention services are yet to reach about 4,000 men. Project director of MDACS, Dr S S Kudalkar, said, “We are trying to reach out to as many people with the help of our NGOs. But, beyond a point we have to leave it to their close-knit community to spread awareness and come forward for testing.”

Calling it a multi-faceted

issue, an HIV consultant and senior doctor at KEM Hospital said many men were unaware about their HIV status. “They end up infecting their wives too. Teaching them prevention measures remain extremely important,” he said.

Besides MSM, the swelling numbers of intravenous drug users (IDU) have become a cause for worry. The incidence has risen from 12.80% in 2005 to 21% till 2009. “Figures for 2010 are being complied, but it seems to have come down to about 6-7%,” said Kudalkar.

Among other high-risk groups, the state is yet to reach out an estimated 16,461 female sex workers, 8.8 lakh migrants and 10,000 truckers.