

## **Vulnerability and Prevention of HIV/AIDS Infection of Women in Bangladesh: Perception and Opinion of Educated Women**

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### **Abstract**

*HIV/AIDS is not merely a 'health hazard', it is also a 'social hazard' that has claimed innumerate lives every day and creates a devastating impact on global socio-economic progress all over the world. The upward tendency of HIV/AIDS incidence is seemed in Bangladesh. Especially, as a kind of most-at-risk population (MARF), women at different levels are very much vulnerable in HIV/AIDS infection. Considering this vulnerability of women (from 14.02% in 2003 to 30 % in 2014) the present study has intended to explore the perception and opinion of educated women about it. Because it is assumed that their participation in combating or preventing HIV/AIDS will be pre-eminent. Analyzing the data collected from them through interviewing and other available sources, it is found that without a partial part of them, the perception, thought and attitude of majority in different affairs is very much constructive and encouraging. So it is suggested that combating this vulnerability, it is needed to ensure active and significant participation of women through preventing all kinds of violence against them, establishing rights and bringing positive social outlook towards them.*

**Keywords:** Vulnerability, Prevention, HIV/AIDS Infection, Perception and opinion of Educated Women.

### **Introduction**

#### ***The Context***

Now-a-days the existence of global health as well as the socio-economic and cultural development is very much hampered, complicated, threatened by Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome that is more

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renowned as AIDS – “a disease thought to always be fatal, caused by infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)” (Barker,1995:4). And HIV is probably the most intensely studied virus in the history of biomedical research (Pantaleo & others, 1993:327). Though AIDS was first manifested only three decades (1981) ago in Los angeles, it has spread all over the world very rapidly. At present around 173 countries are affected by HIV/AIDS (The Daily Naya Diganta, April 17, 2011). So combating HIV/AIDS is a great challenge of 21<sup>st</sup> century. To confront this challenge UN declared “*zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths by 2015*”.

The worldwide HIV/AIDS scenario indicates that HIV incidence increased gradually at different rate at diverse momentums. More than 78 million people have been infected with HIV since 1981to 2012 ([www.avert.org/global-hiv/aids-epidemic.htm](http://www.avert.org/global-hiv/aids-epidemic.htm).accessed on 10.03.15). In that period AIDS has claimed more than 36 million lives and each year claims an estimated 2 million, of which about 0.14 million are children ([www.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_AIDS\\_Day](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day).accessed on 10.03.15). This devastating disease not only decreases manpower through premature death but also increases dependent people. It also assumed that around 14 million children became orphan because of AIDS (The Daily Naya Diganta, July 18, 2008). Beside this, World Bank stated that national growth will be reduced 2-4 percent if the rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence will be 12 percent (The Daily Jugantor, June 4, 2009).There is now compelling evidence that the present trend in HIV/AIDS infection has a profound impact on future rates of infant, child and maternal mortality, life expectancy and economic growth.

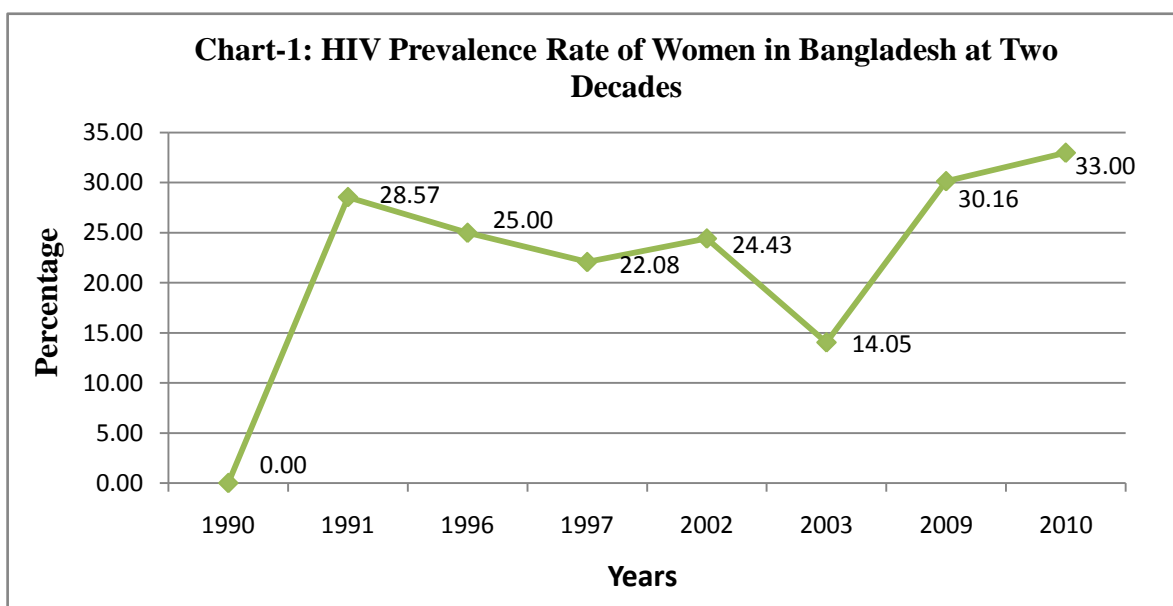
As a developing country Bangladesh remains at high-risk for HIV/AIDS epidemic. Although HIV prevalence in Bangladesh has remained low overall (<1% accordingly 9<sup>th</sup> round National HIV serological surveillance 2011), but poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, porous border, high prevalence of STDs make the country vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. After the first detection (1989) of HIV in Bangladesh, a total of 563 AIDS cases have already died and a cumulative total of 3674 cases of HIV have been confirmed and reported as of 2014 according to NASP. But UNAIDS estimates there are approximately 12,000 people currently living with HIV in Bangladesh (National AIDS & STD Programs, 2009:5). According to WHO, 16 persons in per lac are carrying this germ (The Daily Jugantor, May 6, 2009).

**Table-1: The Present Trend of HIV/AIDS Prevalence in Bangladesh**

Description		2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
<b>HIV affected</b>	Cumulative Total HIV cases till...	3241	2871	2533	2088	1745	1495
	New cases in this year	370	334	445	343	250	288
<b>AIDS affected</b>	Cumulative Total AIDS cases till..	1299	1204	1101	850	619	476
	New cases in this year	95	103	251	231	143	111
<b>Death in AIDS</b>	Cumulative Total death in AIDS	472	390	325	241	204	165
	New death in AIDS	82	65	84	37	39	42

**Source:** National AIDS & STD Programs, *Report on World AIDS Day-2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013*, Dhaka: Department of Health, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, and The Daily Prothom Alo, Dec.2, 2013.

To analyze the present trend of HIV/AIDS incidence it will be seemed that the rate of AIDS cases reduced after 2011 (Table-1). But true is that this rate is increasing highly among most-at-risk populations (MARPs). Specially, women in Bangladesh stay with vulnerable situation in HIV infection because of their different biological, socio-economic and environmental situation. According to global scenario, in 1985, only 7 percent of AIDS cases were women, now the proportion is over 47 percent. However, according to UNAIDS 1900 women in Bangladesh aged 15 and up is now living with HIV out of total 6300 HIV cases ([www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org) accessed on 2.07.11). And now the statistics state at 3300 accordingly UNAIDS GAP Report 2013 (The Daily Prothom Alo, July 18, 2014). The rate of HIV infected women was 14.02% in 2003 that raised 33 % in 2010 (chart-1) and in 2014 it was 30%.



**Source:** Ahmod, Hafiz Uddin, 2003, *AIDS: Parichiti o Protirodh*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, p-129-130, and The Daily Prothom Alo, November 27, 2004, December 2, 2011.

To prevent HIV/AIDS, different research activities are conducted all over the world and most of these (94-95%) are carried out in developed countries and only few (5-6%) in underdeveloped or developing countries (BAPS:2005). As a developing country, limited research activities regarding HIV/AIDS are conducted in Bangladesh. But so far it is known, there is no unique research work which is focused on only educated women in government, non-government or individual level whereas women in Bangladesh is very much vulnerable in HIV infection. By considering this vulnerability, the present study is conducted on educated women. And it is expected that consciousness, perception, thought of educated women will be more profound, outsized, intellectual than illiterate of combating or preventing HIV/AIDS. And it is anticipated that the findings of present study can provide supporting information that will be helped to think new dimension or formulate new intervention of relevant authority for more succession of HIV/AIDS programs.

### ***Factors of HIV/AIDS Infection of Women in Bangladesh***

Different classes of women in Bangladesh now stay with very much vulnerable situation in HIV/AIDS infection. Especially, 6 percent female sex workers (FSWs) have already been affected and an estimated 52 percent are nearly infected with HIV out of 2 lac (UNAIDS, 2003). Beside this, various studies reveal that over one million women & children were trafficked out of the country in the last 30 years. And most of the cases they are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation that may also have increased risk of HIV infection. It is also alarming that the number of female IDUs is increasing day by day and the HIV incident rate of them is 0.8 percent (according to 7<sup>th</sup> surveillance). Besides, the low socio-economic status is a barrier to establish the opinion of women in sexual and family life in male dominated society that is another risk factor of HIV infection of women. Moreover, insufficient knowledge regarding to HIV/AIDS and unconsciousness increases the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS infection. Study reveals that 59 percent of ever-married women of age 15-54 could not mention a single way to avoid contracting HIV ([www.worldbank.org/bd](http://www.worldbank.org/bd).accessed on 10.11.2013). This total scenario reflects that a significant number of women have already been affected and stay with most-at-risk-position in HIV vulnerability that is mostly unknown to them.

Table-2: Presence of some casual factors for affecting HIV/AIDS of women in Bangladesh

Casual Factors		Presence of casual factors in Bangladesh	
		Description	Present status (sources)
Direct factors	Prostitution	Total number of female sex workers	As many as 1 lac (prostitution.procon.org.accessed on 15.03.15)
	Limited use of Condon among FSWs	Female sex workers (FSWs) who used condom with their most recent client	66.7% (BBS-2006-07)
	Low use rate of condom	Condom use rate among married couples as contraceptive method	6.7% (SVRS 2010)
Indirect factors	Poverty situation of women	Staying low quintal of poverty	47% (6 <sup>th</sup> 5 year plan)
	Malnutrition	Suffering long-term energy lacking	34% (6 <sup>th</sup> 5 year plan)
	Trafficking	Women & children are victims of trafficking each month	400 (UNICEF 2011)
	Early marriage	Adolescent marriage rate in ages 15-19 (per 1000 female)	88.79 (SVRS 2010)
	Insufficient knowledge	Having comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (Ages 15-24 year)	14.6% (MICS 2009)

***Government Initiatives for Combating HIV/AIDS and Essentiality of Women's Engagement with those Initiatives***

To combat the HIV/AIDS prevalence in different classes of people different programs have been implemented through 16 government ministries and more than 380 NGOs and AIDS service organization. Beside this, Bangladesh (among the 189 member states) adopted the Declaration of Commitment (DoC) on HIV/AIDS through which arrived a global consensus on a comprehensive framework to achieve the Millennium Development Goals-6.A (MDG -6.A) of *halting and beginning to reverse the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2015*. Besides, different preventing programs have been taken as a low prevalence country (<1%). But it is needed the non-institutional (individual, family, community) initiatives, specially, the participation and cooperation of MARPs to reduce or prevent HIV/AIDS. Since women is the significant part (30% in 2014) of total HIV infected cases in Bangladesh, no initiative will be succeed, effective even realistic except their involvement either participation or cooperation or recommendation. Besides, if they are not conscious about the vulnerability as well as have not taken any

preventive measures, it will be impossible to attain MDG-6.A and to achieve the target of keeping low prevalence of HIV (<1%) in 6<sup>th</sup> 5 Year Plan for government.

### **Objectives**

Considering the vulnerable situation of women in HIV/AIDS infection at Bangladesh, the present study is conducted on the educated women to know their perception and opinion about the vulnerability and prevention of HIV/AIDS infection of women in Bangladesh. To attain this aim some specific objectives are outlined and that are to know about-

- The concept of educated women about HIV/AIDS as well as the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS infection of women in Bangladesh;
- The perception of educated women in respect of the preventive measures of HIV/AIDS;
- Thought and suggestion of educated women with regard to the existing and expected role of mass-media in HIV/AIDS prevention;
- Opinion of educated women about the way forward at government, non-government and individual level in HIV/AIDS prevention.

### **Data and Method**

Underlying those objectives the present study has been conducted through exploratory sample survey method on the basis of primary source of information. Necessary information that is used in this study have been collected from 118 educated women in different ages (not more than 40 years & have at least higher secondary education) who are selected as sample by applying purposive sampling method. And as the source areas of this study the six thana in Dhaka megacity namely: Ramna, Motijheel, Lalbagh, Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Mirpur have been selected. To collect necessary data from the respondents interview schedule was used that was comprised of both-structured, semi-structured and unstructured questions. In accordance with the variation, the collected data have been edited, classified, tabulated and processed using different statistical measurements and analyzed through descriptive statistics. And they were finally edited, analyzed, presented accordingly the purpose of present study.

### **Findings and Discussion**

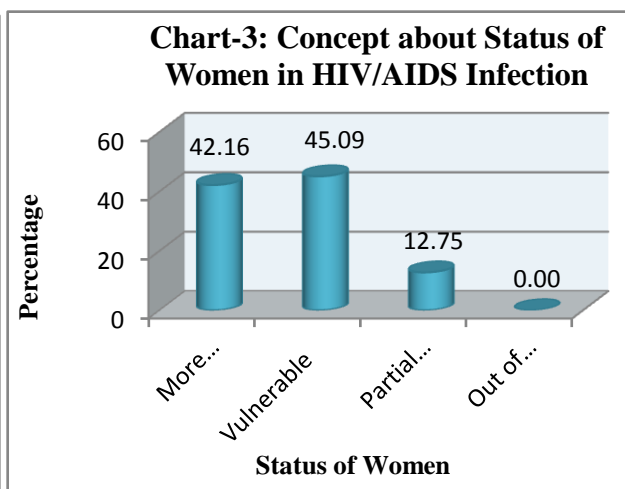
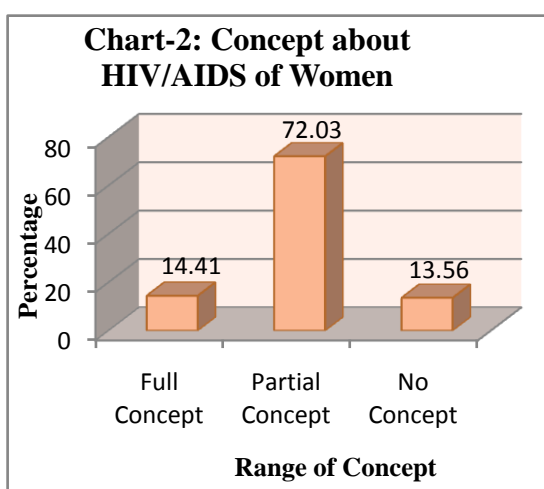
*The concept of educated women about HIV/AIDS as well as the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS infection of women in Bangladesh*

To review the trend of HIV/AIDS incidence of women in Bangladesh it is observed that it was manifested only in two women at first time (1991) but in 2014 the statistics stated at 30 percent of total HIV cases

(According to NASP). So the expertise view is that women in Bangladesh now stay with very much vulnerable situation and at the same time they mention different socio-economic, cultural, geographical environment, biological, behavioral aspect as well as the insufficient knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS as the causes of this vulnerability.

The present study is conducted on those kinds of educated women who are not more than 40 years and have at least higher secondary education. Their average age is 25.58 years and the number of married and unmarried women is respectively 37.29 percent and 62.71 percent. More than one-third of them (37.29%) are post- graduated and only 8.47 percent have completed higher secondary. Though the present study is conducted upon the educated women and almost all of them (99.15%) are known to AIDS, a few of them (7.63%) don't know what kind of disease it is and 6.78 percent think it is a contagious disease. Moreover, 9.32 percent are not concerned about HIV. Beside this, majority of them have concept about the factors and the syndromes of infection and the rate is respectively 98.31 and 89.83 percent but rest of them have no concept.

Though women in Bangladesh are very much vulnerable for HIV infection, still now a few of respondents (13.56%) are not concerned at all about the present status of women in HIV/AIDS infection. On the other hand, majority of them (86.44%) have concept (of whom 72.02 percent have partial and 14.41 percent have full concept) about it (Chart-2). And most of them (87.25%) intend that the status of women is more vulnerable and vulnerable in HIV/AIDS infection. It is also notable that no one thinks she is out of vulnerable (Chart -3).



Sources: Field Study

As the causes of vulnerability of HIV/AIDS infection, different situations of male eminent society are come out through the perception of educated women. More than three-fourth of them (79.41%) intend the ignorance of

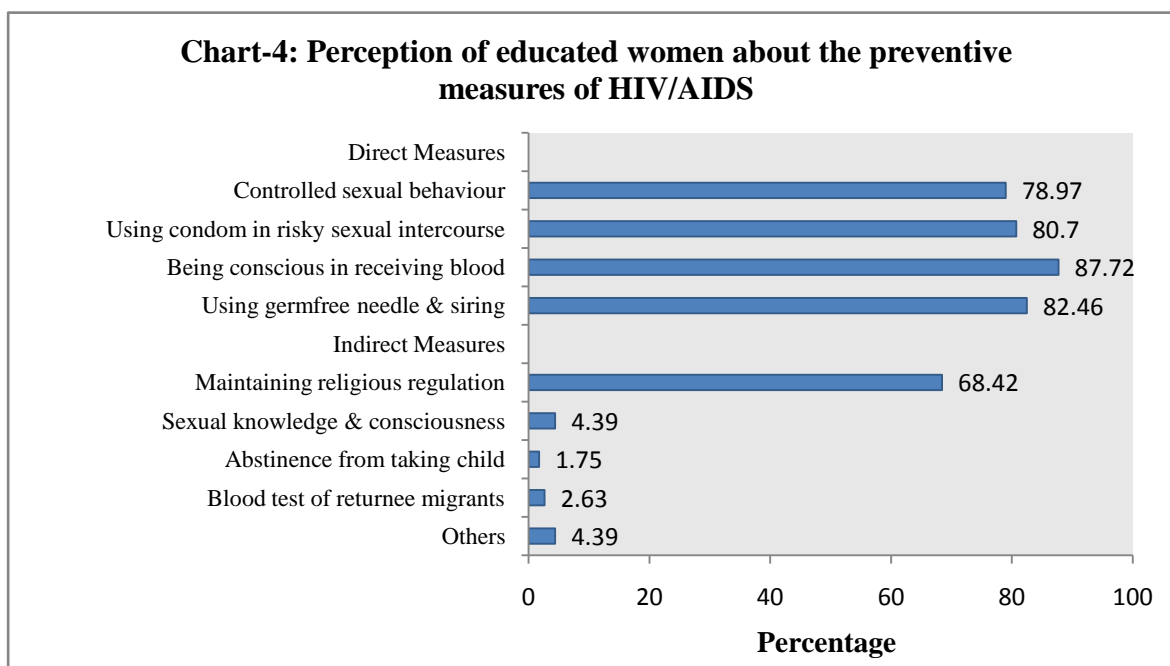
using condom of male in sexual intercourse and their idea is supported through the statistics of BDHS. It mentioned that the rate of condom user among married couple is six percent in 2011(BDHS, 2011). According to progress report of MDG in Bangladesh, this rate at last high risk sex was 43-66 percent at 2009 (GoB, 2009). Beside this, in both cases, more than half of them intend the reliability upon the male mates and dependency of men as the responsible causes (the rate is respectively 60.78% &54.90%). Especially, financial dependency makes them unable in making decision and giving opinion in personal as well as sexual life. And the insufficient knowledge about HIV/AIDS is mentioned by more than two-third women (69.61%). Another strong cause of HIV/AIDS infection of women is increasing rate of professional female sex worker and it is also reflected through the opinion of more than half (63.73%) of respondents. And shyness, geographical location and many other causes (i.e. unconsciousness, free mixing, low socio-economic status, use drug through injection) are unveiling through more than half of their opinion (the rate is respectively 33.33%, 19.61%, 6,86%). This data indicates that the unprogressive and under privileged socio-economic and cultural structure stands as the casual factors in HIV/AIDS infection of women in Bangladesh.

***The perception of educated women in respect of the preventive measures of HIV/AIDS***

“Prevention is the best way of healing HIV/AIDS”- this expertise statement is established on the basis of the conception that still now no effective or available method is innovated regarding HIV/AIDS cure. In this regard, to analyze the perception of educated women it is seen that almost all of them (96.61%) think AIDS is preventable and highest number of them (87.72%) think everyone should conscious in receiving blood to prevent HIV and 82.46 percent think it is necessary to use germfree needle and siring. A study of Virology Department of BSMMMU stated that 13 percent blood of unregistered blood bank was infected by HIV positive (The Daily Ittefaq, December1, 2011). So their idea is supportable in this regard. Beside this, as direct preventive measures controlled sexual behavior and using condom in risky sexual intercourse are mentioned respectively 78.95, 80.70 percent educated women. On the other hand, maintaining religious regulation, sexual knowledge & consciousness and many other measures (i.e. abstinence from taking child, blood test of returnee migrants, social education, keep reliability in personal & family life) are stated by them as indirect



preventive measures of HIV/AIDS and the rate is respectively 68.42, 4.39 and 8.77 percent (Chart-4).



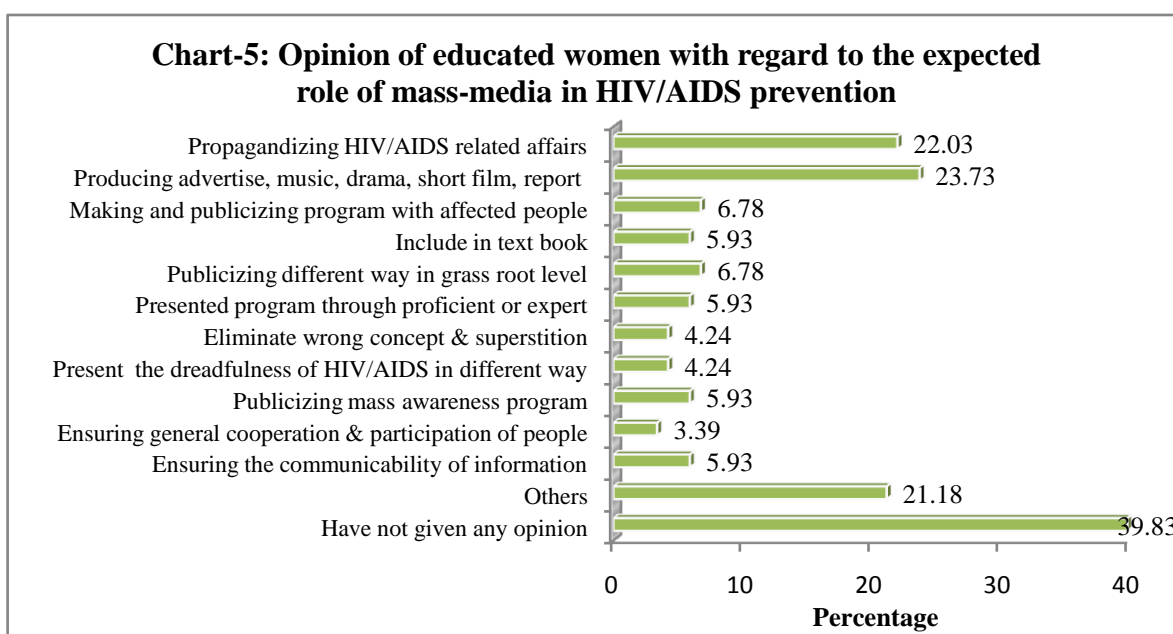
Source: Field Study

***Thought and opinion of educated women with regard to the existing and expected role of mass-media in HIV/AIDS prevention***

Still now mass-media is the most effective way of creating mass-awareness through providing accurate, available and update information about HIV/AIDS prevention in the perspective of Bangladesh. And in this regard, there is not exceptional thought of educated women of present study and almost all of them (95.76%) mention television as the most effective mass-media. Beside this, radio, newspaper, cinema & short film, text book, posturing and others (i.e. seminar, billboard, advertise, wall writing) are pointed out through their statement and the rate of them are respectively 77.97, 74.58, 56.78, 53.39, 41.53, 98.30 percent. And majority of them (95.96%) refer to inform mass-people about the causes, symptoms and dreadful end of HIV infection as the major role of mass-media. Moreover, motivating people in AIDS prevention, awaking people's moral values, creating social movement against AIDS are brought up through their thought (the number is respectively 76.27%, 70.34%, 69.49%).

Though there is no response from more than one-third (39.83%) respondents when they are asked about how can mass-media play more effective role, the highest number of them who have given opinion (61.17%), mention by producing advertise, music, drama, short film,

report related to HIV/AIDS mass-media can play important role and the rate is 23.73 percent of total respondents. Besides, 22.03 percent opines through propaganda about HIV/AIDS and 6.78 percent (in both cases) states by making program with HIV/AIDS affected people and publicizing in grass root level can be the effective role of mass-media. So it is reflected through their opinion that mass-media will be more effective in preventing HIV/AIDS if this issue is presented through more impressive, attractive and available way within universal people (Chart-5).



Source: Field Study

***Opinion of educated women about the way forward at government, non-government and individual level in HIV/AIDS prevention***

As a low HIV prevalent country, most of the HIV/AIDS related activities in Bangladesh are preventive. Beside this, there is existing different treatment, rehabilitation and supportive services for the people with HIV and those activities are initiated by government and nongovernment organizations. The present study explores the thought of educated women about the existing government and non government programs regarding HIV/AIDS as well as about what to be done in government, non-government and individual level. But it is seen that only one-third of them (33.05%) are concerned about government programs and less than one-third (28.81%) are concerned about non-government. And the highest number of them (82.05%), who is concerned about government programs, mentions the comprehensive mass-awareness build up program publicized by mass-media as government initiatives. Moreover, including text book, providing counseling and treatment through health centre, free

blood testing are pointed out by 30.77, 28.21 and 20.51 percent of respondents respectively. On the contrary, around half of them (47.06%), who are concerned about non-government programs, mentions HIV/AIDS related seminar, workshop, discussion arranged by non-government level. Beside this, mass-awareness programs against AIDS, propaganda through private mass-media, awareness build up program within MARPs are stated more than two-third of them (67.64%).

To analyze the data regarding the opinion of respondents about the way forward or the further activities in government, non-government and individual level in preventing HIV/AIDS, it is observed that the highest 32.20 percent opines government should introduce AIDS related treatment & counseling cell in public health centre. Beside this, expediting mass media by government and including AIDS issue in text book are opined by more than half of them (56.78%). And for the both cases, 20.34 percent of them states establishing new department regarding AIDS and indentifying AIDS as national issue as way forward.

On the other hand, in non-government level introducing AIDS related treatment & counseling cell in private health centre and creating social movement against AIDS are opined by 28.81 percent and 27.97 percent respondent respectively. Beside this, a few of them (9.32%) suggest creating mass awareness in grass root level and other initiatives ( such as orientation of sex worker about HIV/AIDS, counseling service, providing consciousness buildup education within adolescence, tele-counseling) should be taken by non- government level.

And in personal level more than half of them (52.54%) think everyone should be concerned in receiving & donating blood. The second (36.44%) and third (31.36%) highest number of them assume using germfree needle & siring and controlling sexual behavior help a man to prevent HIV/AIDS. Moreover, for the both cases, 21.19 percent of respondents believe that in individual level maintaining social & religious regulation and using condom in risky sexual intercourse may be helpful to prevent it. Beside this, acquiring adequate and accurate knowledge about HIV/AIDS is one of the pre-conditions of prevention it. In this purpose everyone should discuss frankly in family level, be self-aware and create awareness within others, concerned about AIDS related documents & participate in seminar is opined by more than one-third respondents (38.13%). Though different opinions are reflected through this statement, it is noted that a significant number of educated women do not any response about this question and the rate is respectively 66.95,

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28.81 and 9.32 percent in government, non-government and individual level (table-3).

Table-3: Opinion of respondents about the way forward at government, non-government and individual level in HIV/AIDS prevention

Levels	Opinion of respondents about the way forward	Frequency	Percentage
Government level	Introducing AIDS related treatment & counseling cell in public health centre	38	32.20
	Establishing new department regarding AIDS	24	20.34
	Expediting mass media	35	29.66
	Including AIDS issue in text book	32	27.12
	Identifying AIDS as national issue	24	20.34
	Others ( counseling among sex worker, creating awareness, supplying condom)	5	4.24
	No response	79	66.95
Non government level	Introducing AIDS related treatment & counseling cell in private health centre	34	28.81
	Creating social movement against AIDS	33	27.97
	Creating mass awareness in grass root level	3	2.54
	Others ( orientation of sex worker about the concept AIDS, counseling service, providing consciousness buildup education within adolescence, tele counseling)	8	6.78
	No response	34	28.81
Individual level	Controlling sexual behavior	37	31.36
	Maintaining social & religious regulation	25	21.19
	Being conscious in receiving & donating blood	62	52.54
	Testing blood before marriage	11	9.32
	Using germfree needle & siring	43	36.44
	Keeping reliability between husband & wife	12	10.17
	Using condom in risky sexual intercourse	25	21.19
	Free frank discussion in family level	10	8.47
	Self-awareness and creating awareness within others	29	24.58
	Concerned about AIDS related documents & participate in seminar	6	5.08
	Others ( being conscious in spouse selection, eliminating homosexual activity, maintaining hygiene, contributing in creating social consciousness)	35	29.66
	No response	11	9.32

Multiple responses table

Source: Field Study

### **Concluding Remarks and Recommendations**

Considering the vulnerability of upward incidence of HIV/AIDS in different classes of women in Bangladesh, the present study is conducted on educated women who are regarded as the predecessor of general women community. But regretting matter is that still now their consciousness in preventing HIV/AIDS is not satisfactory at all. Even a few of them (13.56%) are not concerned at all about the present status of women in HIV/AIDS infection and 3.39 percent don't think it is a preventable disease. Beside this, when they are asked, how can mass-media play more effective role, more than one-third (39.83%) respondents do not make any response. Moreover, three-fourth of them (74.58%) has no idea about government & non-government measures. Even, a partial part of them (9.32%) cannot give any response about what should be done in personal level. So the overall situation of women in combating or preventing HIV/AIDS is assumed without doubt through this scenario of educated women. But it is pleasant that the educated women who have given opinion in different affairs, they mention some diverse, new, potential issue that will be unveil new dimension in thought. Moreover, it is also notable that the consciousness, thought of few women is very much constructive and encouraging for us that are reflected through their opinion. So combating the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS incidence in women as well as general people and strengthening the government measures against AIDS, active and significant participate of women should be ensured. In this context, some recommendations are to be considered:

- there will be bringing constructive and opportune change in existing act to prevent all kinds of violence (i.e. trafficking, physical, psychological, sexual exploitation or torturing etc) against women;
- presenting with consequence the status of women in HIV/AIDS vulnerability in different mass-media including text book;
- creating congenial atmosphere of discussion about AIDS, STDs and formulating protected sexual life in family and social surroundings;
- establishing human rights of women through increasing acceptance in ownership of land, home, others property and different civilian facilities;
- keeping reliability in conjugal life side by side positive attitude in giving importance of female mate's opinion in sexual life;

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- taking initiative in receiving and implementing comprehensive programs of government & non-government level;
- above all expanding cooperation on behalf of each person in society in his/her self aspect about AIDS issue and bringing positive change of social outlook.

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