

## AIDS

# Married couples more at risk of infection

Survey shows at least one partner in every ten unions is positive

By BORNICE BIOMNDO

**M**ore couples are testing positive to HIV and Aids than single men and women.

Married people now dominate the scene as having the highest number of new infections, studies have shown.

According to Kenya Aids Indicator Survey (KAIS), two thirds of Kenyan adults infected with HIV are currently in a marital union. By marital union, they refer to couples le-

gally married or cohabiting.

The survey further reveals that in one out of ten marital unions, at least one partner is living with HIV.

Although once considered as a "safe haven" for women, experts now say marriage has turned to be a factor that increases their chances of getting infected.

## Cohabiting

"Before, we were seeing the highest number of new infections in young single people, but now, it is among married and long term cohabiting couples," said Ms Rosemary Muganda, executive Director of Centre for the Study of Adolescence (CSA).

In the study, 97 per cent of the couples said they did not use condoms. Unlike their single counterparts, married

women were found to be less likely to negotiate for the use of condom by their husbands.

Extramarital sex is blamed for fuelling the epidemic.

According to the study, violence and abuse within marriage and socio-cultural influences also play a key role.

"Cultural practices such as wife inheritance and abuse are prevalent in the spread of Aids in the family," said Dr Andrew Arkutu, a gynaecologist with Path Finder International, a reproductive health organisation.

Ms Muganda and Dr Arkutu gave the remarks yesterday in Nairobi during the premier of a documentary titled *The Silent Partner, HIV in Marriage*.

The 12 minute piece is an initiative of the CSA and Population Action International.

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