

A few years ago in Shymkent, the story about spreading HIV infection caused a wave of anxiety among the population. Families were torn apart, people lost their loved ones. Misunderstanding and fear led to a bitter quarrel among close friends. Over the years, the subject of HIV in the region has become more open and more details emerged, though, unfortunately, more people have been affected by the disease.



*The author of the investigation is Pernebay Sapar, editor of the newspaper “Jan men ten”, correspondent of “Khalyk uni” newspaper, Chymkent, Kazakhstan*

The heroine of our discussion about HIV is a young woman named Aisha, who wanted to share her story so that people could see what problems arise among those who have to deal with a dreadful diagnosis [of HIV].

“I contracted HIV from my husband” – Aisha began telling her story. “We were an average family. My husband had a good post, and our family income was not bad, either. We had a big house and a car. I had three children. We were a happy family, and I thought the happiness would last forever.”

Aisha’s husband, Zangar, found out about his infection at the hospital. He suddenly became ill and, having passed the necessary tests, he learned about his HIV status. It was Aisha’s turn to get tested: she had been infected, too.

The pain and guilt before his wife broke Zangar: he hanged himself in his own house. After that Aisha also tried to commit suicide several times. But then she came around and thought about her children. She decided to carry on for their sake. It was delightful to see that her children were healthy; the virus had not affected them.

“One must think about death in order to live” said a wise man. Though Aisha sometimes thought about death, she decided to fight for a happy future for her children. However, her struggles continued as she had to face her husband’s relatives, who put her through the wringer.

“One cannot keep such a thing a secret, some people from our village found out that Zangar was infected with HIV” says Aisha. “Naturally, the society perceived such information

negatively at the time. People tried to stay away from this "adversity", discriminating against people living with HIV. Zangar's relatives also turned away from me. Without my knowledge they transferred the ownership of our house and car to themselves. At that time I did not feel up to thinking about property. Even if I thought about the welfare of my family, I did not even suspect that my relatives were capable of such an act. It was yet another blow for me. More than physical pain, a person can get hurt from betrayal of loved ones, which is what I believed them to be."

According to Aisha, they had purchased the car and the house together with Zangar on credit. Consequently, she had to pay off the loans by herself, but the husband's relatives intended to take away their house. She did not want to approach law enforcement agencies or lawyers as she feared that the relatives would disclose her HIV status and the judiciary will dismiss her case.

For Aisha, those days were full of hopelessness, unrest, fear, and doubt. Concerns about her HIV status seemed relatively insignificant. Now she had bigger problems: paying her loans, proving her innocence in the incident, and repossessing what belonged to her and her children by right. Young children, low income, mounting debts with interest, devastating loss of her husband.... At that time, Aisha's parents became her only support.

Aisha's housing issue was resolved over time: the relatives of her deceased husband eventually returned the house. However, Aisha is not out of the woods yet, to say the least. She still cannot openly talk about her disease. "There is still a misconception in our society, a prejudice against people living with HIV. Many do not understand, nor wish to accept the situation. Sometimes I fear that I might lose everything I have, because of my status." she says.

We offered Aisha legal advice, but she declined it. "Perhaps I was in need of such support when I was discriminated against by my relatives. Everything is fine now. I do not want to stir up the past. By telling you my story I did not intend to complain, I just thought that this story may serve as a lesson for someone."

## **HIV Statistics**

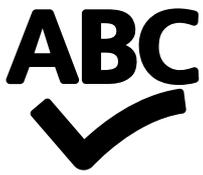
As of 31 January 2015, 24,424 cases of HIV infection have been registered in Kazakhstan, including: 1,595 foreign nationals, 524 anonymously tested persons, 22,305 citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan; the rate per 100,000 people - 129.0.

The highest HIV prevalence rate is registered in Almaty - 198.4, Pavlodar region - 194.4,

Karaganda - 179.2, East Kazakhstan - 149.6, and Kostanay - 125.7.

The HIV prevalence rate among children under 14 years is 9.4. The highest rate of HIV infections among children is recorded in South Kazakhstan region, where prevalence per 100,000 children is 24.3, 14.6 in Karaganda region and 13.9 in Almaty.

***Pernebay Sapar, editor of the newspaper “Jan men ten”***



If you have found a spelling error, please, notify us by selecting that text and pressing *Ctrl+Enter*.