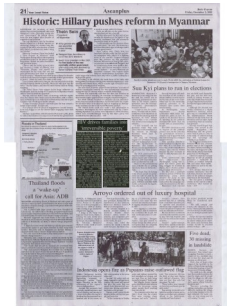


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HIV drives families into 'irreversible poverty'

BANGKOK: Tens of thousands of HIV-affected households in Asia are facing "irreversible poverty" because of the cost of living with the disease, with women and children hardest hit, a UN report said Thursday.

Catastrophic healthcare costs and the loss of employment opportunities due to widespread discrimination mean that many HIV-positive households across the region are in "rapid socio-economic decline," the report said.

"Without intervention, many (HIV-affected families) will slip into irreversible poverty," the UN Development Programme's deputy regional director Nicolas Rosellini said in a statement released Thursday.

He called on regional governments to do more to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the disease, which drives many families into debt

traps, locking their children into a lifetime of poverty.

The extra costs faced by HIV-affected households make it harder for parents to pay for their children's education, with school dropout rates far higher for such families across the region, the report found.

The disease also "disproportionately affects women and girls" who are biologically more vulnerable to infection, have more limited access to treatment and usually take on the bulk of responsibility for caring for affected individuals, it found.

In countries like India, Indonesia and Vietnam, HIV-affected families spend up to three times more on healthcare costs than the average, according to the report, which examined some 17,000 households across Asia. — AFP