

Medical Women's International Association (MWIA) on Wednesday called for female-specific medical research to reduce the burden of epidemic, especially AIDS among women worldwide.

“MWIA wants to draw attention to the fact that women worldwide constitute more than half of all people living with HIV/AIDS. For women in their reproductive years HIV/AIDS is the

“In every region of the world, more adult women than ever before are now living with HIV,” MWIA President, Professor Afua Hesse of Ghana stated in a document made available to Ghana News Agency in Accra.

It called for action as the world observes International AIDS Day on December 1st.

The MWIA is an association representing women doctors from all five continents with the aims to promote the cooperation of medical women in different countries and to develop friendship and understanding between them throughout the world.

MWIA also engages actively against gender related inequalities in the medical profession between female and male doctors including career opportunities and economical aspects.

Prof. Hesse states: “It is now 30 years since the first article on HIV/AIDS was published. Initially it was thought that the disease belonged to intravenous drug users and gay men.

“However, it is now a disease where most new cases are women who have been given the disease by heterosexual transmission. Sixty-seven percent of the disease burden in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women outnumber men in new cases.”

She said gender inequality was a key driver of the epidemic as well as physical, sexual and emotional violence against women, which additionally increased the vulnerability to HIV.

Dr. Waltraud Diekhaus of Germany, who is the Vice-President of MWIA states: “Nowhere is the impact of gender and health more relevant than in the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

She said gender and health consist of biology, cultural behaviours and norms, and power relations between men and women.

“Prevention in women is difficult due to their anatomy making them more prone to infection and their power relations, in that women are often not in control of sexual practices, making it difficult to negotiate safer sex with the use of condoms.

“Most success has been in the decrease of maternal to child transmission during pregnancy and delivery. It is a shame to lose the value of this success by having women succumb to HIV/AIDS once they are sexually active.”

Dr. Shelley Ross of Canada, who is MWIA Secretary General stated that: “In addition to the knowledge that using microbicide gels containing antiviral medications decreases transmission of HIV, the use of prophylactic anti-retroviral medication in the unaffected partners of infected individuals had been shown to be effective in preventing transmission.

She added that the lack of a “woman controlled” method of HIV prevention after 30 years of HIV and AIDS research should be a catalyst to make this a priority for HIV prevention research both nationally and internationally.

Most of the funded research is on treatment not prevention.