



GENDER AND HIV/AIDS

PRESENTATION AT THE FIRST WORLD WOMEN'S CONFERENCE- BANGKOK, THAILAND (19TH TO 24TH JANUARY 2011) BY HELENA AWURUSA

Introduction

All over the world, are more infected and affected by HIV/AIDS infection than men. In Africa, south of the Sahara, 59% of HIV infected adults are women. This means that for every 10 infected men, there are 14 infected women. The adverse HIV situation of women in Africa developed not many years after the onset of the epidemic in Africa and it is steadily becoming more pronounced. **(Kelly 2008 in Gender and HIV/AIDS and the status of Teachers)**

Gender Inequality and HIV infection

HIV/AIDS affect women and men in different ways

1. Physiological and Health
2. Social and economic factors

Gender inequality and inequality in the areas of sexual expectations and behavior compound biological vulnerability of women

Concepts of masculinity

<p>Stereotyped and socially constructed images of masculinity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling man • Initiator of sexual activity • Dominant partner in most sexual transactions • Knowledgeable in sexual matters • Sexual promiscuity is condoned • Man "needs" sexual activity in order to establish is identity • To exert sexual and physical domination over women defines what it means to be a man 	<p>Stereotyped and socially constructed images of Femininity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women should be submissive • Docile • Compliant • Naïve in sexual matters • Sexual promiscuity is a taboo <p>Interest of women in marriage should be driven by these 3 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images of love and friendship that carry with them the imperative of maintaining a satisfactory relationship • The prospect of childbearing
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acquiring social status, money, material resources and important intangible benefits
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These concepts of masculinity and femininity lead to imbalances in decision –making power, with women almost invariably being in a subordinate role and submissive to men. In practice this means that women are weakly placed to determine the circumstances of their sexual lives. They cannot control when, with whom, and under what conditions they have sex, and may often be forced to have unwanted sex.

All of these practices, and attitudes that validate them, increase the vulnerability to HIV infection of both men and women, but because of their subordinate status the risk for women is greater

Other harmful social practices that make women more vulnerable include:

1. Age mixing,

Age mixing increases in a number of ways the risk that the girl will become HIV infected. There is a possibility that the older male partner will already be sexually experienced and hence may already have contracted HIV. The girl has almost no power to insist on safer sexual behaviour, while there is always potential for violence, especially if the girl attempts to end the affair.

2. Early marriage

Early marriages are done for girls before they have reached physiological maturity and when they should still be in attending school

3. Ritual Cleansing

This requires that a widow have intercourse with a member of her late husband's family

4. Dry sex

Herbs are used to dry out and tighten the vagina (in order to increase male pleasure, but at the risk of vaginal abrasions that facilitate the entry of HIV and other STIs

5. Female genital mutilation

The partial or total removal of the external female genitalia which causes chronic genital injury, easy tearing and possible ulceration, thereby heightening HIV risk (between 100 and 140 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation and about two million more are added each year; (World Health Organization)

All the above are long standing traditional practices, some of which are in flagrant violation of human rights and must be stopped.

When AIDS is present women and girls are more extensively affected. Although AIDS has a woman's face, in general it is women who are leading in effective response.



What can be done can be done to prevent women and girls from HIV infection?

Retention and good quality education for girls is one of the ways to reduce the vulnerability of girls to HIV in variety of ways:

- a. It helps them to build their self-esteem to act on HIV prevention messages
- b. It influences the level of power within sexual relations
- c. Leads to better economic prospects
- d. Leads to lifestyle changes that can influence HIV vulnerability

Unfortunately, persisting gender inequalities in education continue to exclude a disproportionate number of girls from these benefits and thereby heighten their vulnerability to potential infection

PARTICIPANTS RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Use of Mass Media, talk shows debates etc
2. Creating counseling centres in our unions to care and support teachers and students affected and infected with HIV
3. Advocate for free ARVs
4. Developing publications and effective distribution
5. Formulate policies on HIV/AIDS prevention
6. Lobby Governments to introduce HIV/AIDS as a subject in the Curriculum
7. EI/ together with unions to continue with the EFAIDS programme
8. Build the capacity of the Women's committee on HIV/AIDS in order to roll it at all levels
9. Set up online campaigns to draw Corporations to ply back some of their profits with the HIV prevention in their country's operations on HIV
10. Use the women networks to put pressure on governments to enforce cooperate bodies to invest in education ie HIV/AIDS prevention and school feeding programmes
11. Unions to lobby government to make quality public education accessible to all children to complete the education cycle ie stay longer in schools and learn more about their rights