

# Lecture 4: HIV/AIDS & GENDER

P. KYALO MULWA

# HIV/AIDS AND GENDER

- HIV and AIDS is a gender issue because men/boys and women/girls are vulnerable in many ways
- Vulnerability is influenced by interaction of a wide range of factors such as:

# HIV/AIDS AND GENDER

- 1. Personal factors like sexual history, ability to protect one self and others, knowledge about treatment and support programmes, skill and access to use treatment and support programmes
- 2. Societal/ social factor like cultural norms, laws, social practices, health and health care beliefs

# Vulnerability

- Three different types of vulnerability are:
  1. Biological vulnerability
  2. Socio-cultural vulnerability
  3. Economic vulnerability

# Vulnerability

## 1. Biological vulnerability

- Women/girls are biologically vulnerable to HIV & AIDS and STD infections than men
- They are 2 – 4 times more likely to become infected with the virus after intercourse with their male partners because:
  - They have large surface area exposed to the virus

# Vulnerability

- The amount of virus present in semen is greater than in the vaginal
- Semen may remain in the vagina hours after intercourse
- Women/girls are more likely to have an untreated STDs since the area of infection is hidden and often unnoticed putting them at a greater risk of contracting HIV infection from an infected factor

# Vulnerability

- Women/girls are more likely to be the recipients of blood transfusion due to anemia and complications of child birth and menstruation
- Tearing and bleeding due to “rough sex”, rape or female genital mutilation (FGM) increases the risk of HIV infection in women/girls

# Vulnerability

## 2. Socio-cultural vulnerability

- Gender related social norms can increase women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS e.g. women are expected to have only one life partner whereas society encourages men to have more
- Pushing up HIV rates in the girl & women is age mixing. If girls' sole sex partners were boys of their own age, they would run little risk of becoming infected because there are few HIV infections among boys before late teens



# Vulnerability

## 2. Socio-cultural vulnerability

- Men believe that young girls are free of HIV infections ... in some communities, men believe that they get HIV free after having sex with young girls
- High social value attached to virginity in unmarried girls may also pressure parents & and community to ensure that girls are kept ignorant about sexual matters. Female ignorance of sexual matters is often viewed as a sign of purity and innocence hence preventing them from accessing information about sex or services related to their sexual health

# Vulnerability

## 3. Economic vulnerability

- In many situations around the world women are economically dependent on men. More than 2/3 of world's women are illiterate and 70% live in poverty
- Due to socio-economic status, most women do not have autonomy on resources of they own

# Vulnerability

## 3. Economic vulnerability

- Women fear that their husbands may abandon them making it difficult to negotiate safe sex
- To many women, sex is not a question of choice but rather a question of survival hence they have little or no control over how and when to have sex for fear of jeopardizing their relationships/marriage

# Vulnerability

## 3. Economic vulnerability

- Some women are forced into sex by economic necessities resulting from orphanage, being a widow, etc, hence engaging in activities like prostitution

# HIV/AIDS AND GIRL/WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

- The HIV scourge has already encroached upon the human rights of girls/women in the following ways:
  - a) Women are forcefully exposed to HIV infection e.g. by rape hence denied their right to life
  - b) Many socio-cultural and economic factors restrict women rights to health and right of access to health, further increasing their vulnerability to HIV

# **HIV/AIDS AND GIRL/WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE**

- c) Some women infected by HIV are suffering further denials of human rights through deprivation of their rights to bear children and right to freedom of reproductive choice
- d) For women are mostly blamed for the spread of HIV infection which encroaches their right to freedom from discrimination. They are seen as vectors of HIV infection, suffer stigmatization, rejection and expulsion from family and community structures

# HIV/AIDS AND GIRL/WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

- Women right to knowledge has also been transgressed in a number of ways
- The recognition of women right to knowledge is essential to their informed choice and action
- Universal human rights (1948) came up with the following rights:
  - Right to liberty, security and freedom of movement
  - Right to dignity
  - Right to work

# **HIV/AIDS AND GIRL/WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE**

- Right to education
- Right to social security and services
- Right to equality – equal protection before the law
- Right to marriage and family life
- Right to health



# EFFORT TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL HIV/AIDS VULNERABILITY

1. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 9<sup>TH</sup> session (1990) – general recommendation NO. 15 advocates avoidance of discrimination against women in national strategies for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS -

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm>

# EFFORT TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL HIV/AIDS VULNERABILITY

2. Beijing declaration and platform for action (1995) strategic objective No. 3 is on undertaking gender sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health issues – read more <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en>

# EFFORT TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL HIV/AIDS VULNERABILITY

3. The international conference on population and development in Cairo (1994) identified actions to prevent, reduce the instance of and provide treatment for sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS , the complications of STDs with special reference to girls and women – read more

<http://www.unfpa.org/publications/international-conference-population-and-development-programme-action>

# EFFORT TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL HIV/AIDS VULNERABILITY

4. The second international consultations on HIV/AIDS and Human rights in Geneva (1996) stated that communities should collaborate to promote a supportive and enabling environment for women and children by addressing the underlying prejudices and inequalities through dialogue, specially designed social and health services and support to community groups –  
Read more

[http://data.unaids.org/publications/irc-pub02/jc905-guideline6\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/publications/irc-pub02/jc905-guideline6_en.pdf)

# STRATEGIES FOR GENDER SENSITIVE PROGRAMS TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL RISKS TO HIV/AIDS

## 1. Combat or remove ignorance by;

- Improving the access of girls to formal schooling
- Ensuring women and girls have information about their own bodies, education about AIDS and STDs and the life skills to say NO to unwanted or unsafe sex
- Promote gender awareness in HIV prevention programmes

# **STRATEGIES FOR GENDER SENSITIVE PROGRAMS TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL RISKS TO HIV/AIDS**

2. Provide women friendly services - This means exercise cultural and social sensitivity in provision of health care, HIV & STDs prevention services, condoms and STD care making them available where and when women need them
3. Reinforce women's economic independence by:
  - i. Multiplying and strengthening existing training opportunities for women, women credit programmes, saving schemes and cooperatives and link them to HIV prevention programmes

# **STRATEGIES FOR GENDER SENSITIVE PROGRAMS TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL RISKS TO HIV/AIDS**

- ii. Multiplying and strengthening existing training opportunities for women, women credit programmes, saving schemes and cooperatives and link them to HIV prevention programmes
- iii. Providing alternatives to sex workers practically as possible in areas where migration of young girl/women to enter sex work has become an established pattern in areas where sex workers operate

# STRATEGIES FOR GENDER SENSITIVE PROGRAMS TO REDUCE INDIVIDUAL RISKS TO HIV/AIDS

## 4. Reduce vulnerability through policy change

- Policies from community to national level must be reshaped if women's vulnerability to HIV is to be reduced
- This means protecting women's human rights and fundamental freedoms improving their economic independence and legal status
- This can not be achieved without a greater political voice for the women



# REVISION

1. Discuss the Biological, socio-cultural and economic vulnerabilities of women and the girl child to HIV/AIDS
2. Explain how the HIV scourge has encroached upon the human rights of girls and women
3. Discuss the effort by the international community to reduce individual vulnerability to HIV/AIDS among the women and the girl child
4. Discuss strategies to employ when developing gender sensitive programs on reduction of individual risks to contracting HIV/AIDS

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