

Aspects of Gender and HIV

World Aids Day Annual Lecture

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Appreciation and Thanks

- Thanks to Development Studies Association of Ireland (DSAI), Irish Forum for Global Health (IFGH), and the Gender Advanced Research Consortium (ARC) for making room for this WAD event in their joint Conference
- Thanks to the Irish people for establishing and maintaining through Irish Aid the WAD event, especially in these current years of hardship
- Congratulations to Ireland on its award for commitment to addressing the challenges of international migration of highly skilled persons from developing nations
- Thanks to all who continue to focus on the devastation HIV brings to people, notwithstanding significant progress against the epidemic

WAD Annual Lectures

- The first gathering for this event in 2006 considered Stigma and Discrimination
- Was held at time of launch of Irish Stamp Out Stigma campaign, something that has had some excellent outcomes but still needs to be brought even further forward
- This evening we consider gender and HIV, an area where there is a huge amount of discrimination, inequity, inequality, stigma, and totally unacceptable treatment of human beings, mostly women and girls
- Need to join hands with the Gender ARC (Advanced Research Consortium), with Trocaire and with all right-minded people, maybe in a new campaign to stamp out every form of gender based discrimination, be it against women and girls or against men and boys

Achievements in Confronting AIDS

- World has made great strides in standing up to the AIDS epidemic and transforming it for millions from being a fatal disease to one that is manageable
- The great achievement: between 1996-2012 ART averted 6.3 million AIDS-related deaths
- Record number (10.6 million) on ART globally by end of 2012
- Vastly expanded access of pregnant women to ART for protection of their own health and that of their unborn babies – 62%

But the Epidemic is not Over

- Clearly not over for the 35.3 million people worldwide living with HIV at the beginning of this year – more than 7.5 times the population of Ireland – and more than 10% of these are aged 50 and above
- Not over for the 1.6 million who died of an AIDS-related death last year or for the families of these people
- Not over for the 2.3 million people who became newly infected with HIV in 2012
- Sixth leading cause of deaths in the world and leading cause of deaths among women of reproductive age, 15 to 44
- With new infections outnumbering AIDS deaths, the number living with HIV is increasing steadily, with all the implications this has for suffering among people, discrimination against women, and treatment, costs and sustainability down the line in the years ahead

Worrying Developments

- \$87 billion is required from 2014 to 2016 to reach all those vulnerable to AIDS, TB and Malaria in low and middle-income countries with essential services that contribute to bringing the three diseases under control – nearly \$30 billion a year. Can this amount be raised in the current economic climate, given that the world committed \$19 billion to AIDS in 2012 and signs that commitments are being flat-lined?
- AIDS, TB and malaria remain dangerous inhibitors of growth and development and are central to the burden of disease across the developing world
- Yet health is not maintaining its priority status; the key words in the UN Secretary General's global development framework beyond 2015, known as the High Level Panel Report, are poverty, growth, partnership and access
- In some countries the dimensions of the epidemic sound as if they come from science fiction: in Swaziland, HIV prevalence among adults aged 18-49 has remained unchanged between 2006-2011 at 31-32%, and among women aged 30 to 34 the prevalence was 53.8 percent. In Uganda, at one time the model country in the way it showed HIV decline, there is evidence of rising incidence; in Lusaka one in eight people are infected

The Epidemic Rolls Along for Women and Girls

- Globally, more women (52%) than men are living with HIV
- HIV prevalence is much higher among young women (Zambia, 6.5% among 15-24 year olds; South Africa, 11.5%) than among young men (Zambia, 3% in same age group; SA, 4.5%)
- Women and girls are dying at younger ages than men and boys
- It's not only HIV - in settings with high HIV prevalence, young women aged 15–24 experience tuberculosis rates 1.5–2 times higher than men in the same age group
- The incredible assault of the HIV and AIDS pandemic on women has no parallel in human history. ... The pandemic is preying on them relentlessly, threatening them in a way that the world has never yet witnessed (Stephen Lewis and James Morris)

What Makes Women so Vulnerable?

- The epidemic affects women in different ways than men:
 - ❖ On physiological and health grounds women are at higher risk of infection
 - ❖ Socio-economic factors greatly increase women's vulnerability to HIV infection
 - ❖ When AIDS is present women are more extensively affected
- But although AIDS has a woman's face, in general it is women who are leading an effective response in managing and coping and in provision of care (home-based; responses of church women; many civil society organisations)

Physiological and Health Factors Put Women at Greater Risk of HIV Infection

- More extensive and fragile tissues in female genital areas, with greater exposure over a significant period of time to large volumes of high risk body fluids, make HIV transmission from male to female seven times more likely than transmission from female to male
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are less visible in the female body and more likely to go undetected/untreated
- Risk of HIV infection doubles during and after pregnancy
- Women are often under-nourished and in run-down health condition (because of poverty and/or pregnancies)

The Social Vulnerability of Women to HIV Infection

- Few women can negotiate the when and how of sex
- Double standards in society, expecting sexual naiveté from women and experience from men (distorted social meaning of masculinity and femininity)
- Economic and geographic freedom and mobility of her male partner place a woman at risk
- ***A woman is vulnerable if she is married and remains faithful to her husband***
- ***A woman is vulnerable if she is single or has no partner***

Social Practices Increase Women's Vulnerability to HIV Infection

- Harmful practices in society (age-mixing; sugar daddies; multiple concurrent partnerships)
- Damaging customary practices (early marriage; wife inheritance; dry sex; female genital mutilation)
- Retrogressive child-rearing practices (girls reared to a submissive, non-assertive, subordinate status)
- Message communicated at time of initiation and at kitchen parties: please your husband at all costs
- Girls' restricted access to school, progress when there, opportunities afterwards
- ***Society concurs in according inferior status to women***

Report from a Zambian Woman

- Before my marriage I was counselled by elderly female relatives who emphasized that a woman should take a subordinate role within the household and should obey her husband
- They even said that violence against women within the household was normal and acceptable, and a woman should remain in her marriage regardless of her husband's behaviour

The Economic Vulnerability of Women to HIV Infection

- Economically subordinate to men
- Limited access to capital, credit, education
- Many who receive inadequate financial support from partners have to apply their own ingenuity and resources to maintaining household
- Bear greater part of burden of child care (financially and otherwise)
- Sale of sex (survival sex) may be the only way to meet household survival needs (and husband may acquiesce in this)

An Epidemic of Violence

- Violence against women is the most pervasive of all human rights violations
- Globally, violence against women within relationships is often seen as normal
- Up to half of all adult women have experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partners
- Systematic sexual violence against women has characterized almost all recent armed conflicts and is used as a tool of terror and 'ethnic cleansing'
- Many justice systems are not victim-friendly, resulting in women and girls being blamed for, rather than protected from, gender-based violence

Violence against Women

- 1 in 3 women worldwide will experience violence in her lifetime
- 1 in 5 women worldwide will survive rape or attempted rape
- Some 30% of women are forced into their first sexual experience
- Up to 60% of youth in certain locations feel that forced sex with someone known to you is not sexual violence
- Intimate partner violence increases risk of HIV, with women who experience such violence facing a 50 percent increased risk of acquiring the virus

Violence against Children

- Globally, 20% of girls and 10% of boys experience sexual abuse as a child
- Nearly 50% of all sexual assaults in the world are against girls aged 15 or younger
- Violence against children takes place in the home, school, community – perpetrators are frequently individuals the children know and trust
- As many as 50% of school-children in some countries report having been physically or sexually assaulted while at school
- Violence against children increases their vulnerability to HIV infection

Stereotyped Gender Images: Machismo

- The controlling male
- The man is the main initiator and the dominant partner in sexual activity
- A man “needs” sexual activity to establish his identity
- In many societies, sexual and physical domination over women defines what it means to be a man
- It is expected that men will be knowledgeable and experienced and tolerance is shown for extra-marital male sexual activities
- Extent to which men’s all-conquering assertions mask their fear of appearing weak? (The powerful gaze of their peer group never far away)

A Fable

- When God had almost finished creating Adam and Eve he had two parts left
- He wasn't sure how to share them out, so he decided just to ask them which they wanted
- He told them one of the parts he had was a thing that would allow the owner to pass water while standing up
- Immediately Adam started jumping about and pleading, Oh please let me have that
- God asked him, Don't you want to hear about the other thing I have?
- Adam replied excitedly, No – nothing could be better than this
- Eve just smiled and told God to give it to Adam since he wanted it so much

A Fable (continued)

- Adam was so excited with his new apparatus that he just kept running all over the place, using it as much as he could
- He hit the side of a tree; he hit a rock; he wrote his name in the sand
- Gosh, he said, now I am a real man. This is just great
- God and Eve watched him in amusement
- Then God said to Eve, Sorry – but you'll have to be satisfied with the only thing I have left
- Eve said, That's all right. What's it called?
- And God said, Brains!

Stereotyped Gender Images: Feminismo

- A woman should be docile, submissive, compliant
- Maintaining a relationship is more salient than being dominant in that relationship
- Responding to the needs of a man is of supreme importance
- A woman should see her primary role in sexual activity as being to ensure the man's comfort and pleasure
- High expectations that a woman will remain faithful to her partner, with little tolerance for her involvement in extra-marital sexual activity
- Acknowledgement that a woman might get pleasure from sexual activity, but satisfying the man is of greater importance

What Lies behind the Stereotype?

- Do prevalent views of what it means to be a man entail pretence?
- Does a deep sense of insecurity, fragility and compulsion to match up to standards underlie or even drive much of the sexual behaviour and posturing of men?
- Are men subject to intense social pressures and pervasive anxieties to conform to the ideal of what it means to be a man?
- Will transforming the stereotyped image of male gender identity bring more freedom to both men and women?
- Can these stereotypes be changed?

Transforming Gender Norms

- Many existing social and cultural norms relating to gender are dishonourable and disempowering for women; debasing and destructive for men
- They need to be changed into something that better befits the dignity of men and women alike (as highlighted in recent WHO booklet for addressing VAW)
- These norms are socially constructed and hence can be socially changed
- This calls for leadership, influencing and inducing others to do the right thing
- Role of media, entertainment industry, education in promoting such change
- Extent to which the school culture manifests the essential equality between men and women or reflects the gender stereotypes

Four Ways for Addressing the Joint Problem of HIV and VAW

- Empower women through integrated, multi-sectoral approaches
- Transform social and cultural norms related to gender
- Integrate violence against women and HIV services
- Promote and implement laws and policies related to violence against women, gender equality and HIV

The Basic Problem

- HIV and AIDS bring unspeakable additional sufferings and problems to women and girls
- They call into question the values by which we live our lives and how we treat one another
- They also bring out in stark relief that discrimination and violence against women are universal realities
- They show how the legacy of systematic bias against women is embedded in the economic, social, political, religious and linguistic structures of our societies
- The AIDS epidemic casts a very powerful spotlight on this fault-line in all of our societies

The low status of women is at the heart of the AIDS epidemic

The central issue isn't technological or biological: it is the inferior status or role of women

When women's human rights and dignity are not respected, society creates and favours their vulnerability to AIDS

(Jonathan Mann)

We live at time of sea change in relationships between women and men

- Major world bodies have stressed the need to move towards the goal of gender equality
- This is needed in order to combat HIV and AIDS
- Even more fundamentally, it is necessary in its own right
- AIDS or no AIDS, women and men are essentially equal
- Making that equality a lived reality is a major challenge for every individual, community, institution and country

*Some look at things that are,
and ask **WHY?***

*I dream of things that never were and ask
WHY NOT?*

(George Bernard Shaw)

Just 50 years ago, Martin Luther King also had a dream, the dream of real freedom for the people of colour in the US, the dream that one day the United States would rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal."

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the most noble of our human dreams

- **I have a dream** that one day our world will turn into reality its belief that women and men are fully equal to one another in every respect
- **I have a dream** that one day the whole world will see the countries of Africa and Asia, and all other countries of the world, as shining lights of freedom, justice, reconciliation and respect between women and men on an equal footing
- **I have a dream** that those who follow us will live in a society where they will not be classified by the label of their gender but by the quality of their character
- **I have a dream** that one day we shall see that there is no more exploitation of women, no more gender-based violence, no more discrimination between male and female, but that we are all one in our common humanity

Friends, let equality ring

- When we let equality ring, when we let it ring from every town and every village, from every province and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, women and men, girls and boys, will be able to join hands and triumphantly sing, "Equal at last! Equal at last! Thanks be to God Almighty, we are equal at last!"
- This is our dream. This is our faith. This is our hope
- Let us work together to make it happen