

Firelight Newsflash! 17 December 2007 - Focus on Fighting Stigma

Dear partners,

Stigma associated with HIV cannot be underestimated or ignored, as a web of secrecy, fear and shame can add a heavy burden to young shoulders. Both the fear of and the experience of stigma may be limiting factors on child opportunity and experience. Basic education and fact sharing are seen as necessary components in helping to ensure community support and acceptance of families affected by AIDS, but as we all know, these efforts are not sufficient in themselves.

How can we help to break down the stigma and discrimination experienced by so many? You know better than us. Though only those affected can break down the secrecy, we are all responsible for speaking out to challenge stigma and discrimination in our communities.

This newsflash focuses on issues relating to stigma and discrimination and how they affect orphans and other vulnerable children. Many of the text and materials were taken from the International HIV/AIDS Alliance's OVC Support Toolkit, which can be found at:

<http://www.ovcsupport.net/sw3085.asp>.

Additional materials and links are found below. Please feel free to share with us your challenges and successes in fighting stigma and discrimination at the community level!

Our best,
The Firelight Team

Please note: Due to the holidays, the Newsflash will not be sent out again until after the new year. Thanks for all of your encouragement & support for this information sharing during 2007!

What is Stigma & Discrimination?

Stigma and discrimination mean that people are not treated equally or fairly. The **right to be treated equally** is part of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Other sections look in detail at **participation**, **protection from abuse** and **legal issues**.

Key points about stigma and discrimination are:

1. Stigma is based on beliefs. A person is 'stigmatised' when another person

thinks negatively of them because of something they have experienced or because they belong to a particular group. Discrimination occurs when actions are taken (or not taken) on the basis of a stigmatising belief.

2. HIV/AIDS leads to stigma and discrimination.

3. Stigma and discrimination occur in many settings, including the family, local community, **school** and **health care facilities**.

4. There are many negative effects of stigma and discrimination.

5. Stigma and discrimination go against a **child's right** to be treated equally and fairly.

6. There are many actions which can be taken by individuals and organisations to overcome stigma and discrimination.

Stigma, discrimination and HIV/AIDS

Stigma is about beliefs and attitudes. Discrimination relates to actions. Both are based on negative views of people simply because they are seen as belonging to a particular group. HIV/AIDS is commonly associated with stigma and discrimination. This may be because of HIV's association with death, sex and drug use.

Children and young people in other groups may also experience stigma and discrimination. These include orphans, children of women who sell sex, street children, refugees, children in detention, children who use drugs and children in **child-headed households**. Many of these experience 'double' stigma because they are also more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Effects of stigma and discrimination

Children and young people experience stigma and discrimination in different places. These include at home, in their local community, in schools and at health care facilities. This may result in children and young people being denied access to **health care** and **education**.

Effects of stigma and discrimination include:

Fear of members of the stigmatised group.

Verbal and physical abuse of children and young people.

Fear of disclosing information, including results of HIV tests. This may mean

that people do not get the treatment they need.

Reduced self-esteem and confidence among children.

Children and young people being isolated socially. This can mean they are 'excluded' from society.

Withdrawal, depression and other **psychosocial problems**.

Children and young people running away from the place where they are experiencing stigma and discrimination. This may involve them moving from rural to urban areas. This carries the risk of them ending up living on the **street**.

The right to equality

Children and young people have a **right** to be treated equally. If a child is treated differently just because they belong to a different group, they are being discriminated against. This is against their human rights.

Proposed action

The following actions can help overcome stigma and discrimination:

Laws which ensure that children and young people are treated equally and fairly. Where laws exist, communities need to understand what they mean. There also needs to be an efficient and affordable way for people to use the justice system when a law is broken.

Local advocacy on behalf of children and young people to ensure that communities tackle **stigma and discrimination** and support children's rights to be treated equally.

Psychosocial support to children and young people experiencing stigma and discrimination.

Allowing children and young people to **participate** in activities and decisions. Children and young people can then challenge stigma and discrimination themselves.

Programmes must themselves avoid discrimination. This means, for example, that they should not target only children whose parents have died of AIDS. In addition, they should not use **stigmatising terms** such as 'AIDS orphans'.

Understanding & Challenging HIV Stigma: Toolkit for Action

The Toolkit is a resource collection of participatory educational exercises for use in raising awareness and promoting action to challenge HIV stigma. Trainers can select from the exercises to plan their own courses for different target groups—both AIDS professionals and community groups. Modules 1 and 2 specifically explore the impact that stigma has on children and young people. These exercises were developed out of the findings of a study on children's experiences of stigma carried out in Zambia in 2002-03 and with input from

children in Tanzania who shared their stories with the facilitators in 2007.

Stigma faced by children takes many forms. Some examples include:

- Children may be blamed for their parents' death; for being a burden; or in some countries orphans are seen as 'unlucky children' as if they 'killed their parents'.
- Children may be excluded from school, families and communities because of fear of infection if there is HIV in their family.
- Orphans are often treated differently from other children in families, such as being given extra work, and are often accused of carrying on their parents' 'bad behaviour'.
- Street children are seen as 'dirty' and 'out of control'.

This module aims to help explore and understand the different ways in which children are stigmatised, and to look at strategies to change attitudes and experiences. It is divided into two sections: exercises for children and exercises for adults.

http://www.pacttz.org/downloads/anti-stigma/6_Stigma_and%20children.pdf

<http://www.pacttz.org/downloads/anti-stigma/Youth%20and%20Stigma%20Toolkit.pdf>

<http://www.ovcsupport.net/graphics/OVC/documents/0000577e00.pdf>

Additional Links & Resources

The following links provide additional information on how to recognize, identify, and combat stigma in your own homes, schools, and communities:

1) Common at its Core: HIV-related Stigma Across Contexts, International Center for Research on

Women http://www.icrw.org/docs/2005_report_stigma_synthesis.pdf

2) HIV/AIDS Stigma: Finding Solutions to Strengthen HIV/AIDS Programs, International Center for Research on

Women http://www.icrw.org/docs/2006_stigmasyntesis.pdf

3) Voices for Equality and Dignity: Qualitative Research on Stigma and Discrimination Issues as they affect PLWHA in Malawi, Malawi Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (See attached)

4) Lessons Learnt: Religious and Community Mobilization for Decreased Stigma and Discrimination in Cambodia, CARE

<http://www.care.org/newsroom/specialreports/aids/pdfs/200608/Cambodia.pdf>

Brief: Community Engagement for Universal Access

A comprehensive approach to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, called Community Engagement, for adults and children living with and affected by HIV. This means bringing people with HIV, community stakeholders and health providers together to develop partnerships, address gaps and difficulties, and support families and individuals.

Each has different roles to play in the community engagement process, which builds on their experience and strengths and coordinates activities in order to:

- Mitigate the impact of stigma and discrimination on prevention, treatment, care, and support

- Increase community awareness and understanding of available HIV services

- Increase access to and use of services through referral systems and support

- Increase community understanding of the connections between prevention, care and treatment

- Support individuals in successful use of treatment and preventive behaviours

- Support health care workers in delivering services and ensuring that their own health needs are met.

This two page briefing outlines why community engagement is so necessary, who should be involved and what are the key components to put it into practice; examples are given of three Alliance programmes where this approach is already making a difference to the uptake and use of essential health and support services for adults and children living with and affected by HIV.
