

HOW TO TACKLE GENDER INEQUALITY

HIV affects women and men differently both in terms of vulnerability and of impact. Biological factors make women more susceptible to infection than men, and structural inequalities in the status of women make it harder for them to protect themselves. Women are becoming infected with HIV at a faster rate than men, and young women are particularly at risk. Women carry a greater share of the burden of care.

Three quarters of adults with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa are young women (aged 15-24), and nearly three-quarters of those in the Caribbean.

AIDS is the leading cause of death among African-American women in the USA.

2006 Report on the global AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS

Generally speaking women have less income and property than men, less access to information and education, and fewer rights – including in marriage and sexual relations. Laws often discriminate against women especially in areas such as inheritance. Women's lack of economic security can force them into high-risk situations, such as sex work. Social norms tend to condone men having multiple partners, and different work situations can add to the pressures on them by separating them for substantial periods from home and family.

In a review of 79 countries, women's participation in the development and review of national AIDS frameworks was non-existent in eight nations and inadequate in 64.

UNAIDS

In the world of work women face particular problems including:

- Fewer opportunities for education
- Greater concentration in the informal economy
- Discrimination in hiring, training and promotion
- Unequal pay and access to productive resources, including credit
- Sexual harassment and abuse.

The world of work has a key role to play. Trade unions, employers' organizations and national authorities can play a crucial role in reducing the vulnerability of women to HIV by increasing their economic security and promoting their rights. Through leadership, advocacy and practical actions in the workplace they can make a real difference by:

- challenging attitudes and structures that disadvantage women, and protecting their rights through laws and policies;
- increasing the representation of women on decision-making bodies at all levels;
- encouraging the education, training and recruitment of women;
- giving women more options in order to ensure a secure income.

The different situations, attitudes and needs of women and of men mean that HIV/AIDS programmes – in the workplace as in the community – should be gender aware.

Workplace programmes for HIV prevention, care and treatment – gender checklist:

- baseline survey disaggregates knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of men and of women
- workplace policy is gender-specific, specifies zero tolerance for sexual harassment, and has clear complaints procedure
- enterprise avoids practices that encourage risk-taking behaviour, for example in entertaining clients
- workplace programme targets men and women explicitly:
 - education for women explains their risk and empowers them to protect themselves
 - education for men promotes responsibility in sexual behaviour
- gender balance exists on relevant HIV committees and among peer educators
- women have equal access to and uptake of confidential voluntary testing and ARV treatment
- reasonable accommodation (adjustments to tasks, work station and rest breaks) takes into account care-giving demands on women employees
- deployment of staff away from home is reduced, family housing provided where relevant
- workplace programmes include the families of employees:
 - prevention programmes for spouses and children, including information on mother-to-child transmission
 - insurance schemes cover employees and dependants
 - links with community-based credit and savings schemes strengthen the economic security of the household.

Some trade unions and enterprises have campaigns and education programmes to combat workplace harassment. Others provide special training programmes for women. Workers and employers have developed agreements to improve women's pay and working conditions (including child care support).

Further information:

- *ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work*
- *Implementing the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, an education and training manual – module 5*
- *HIV/AIDS Behaviour Change Communication: A toolkit for the workplace* (ILO and FHI)
- *ILO/AIDS brief: Women, girls, HIV/AIDS and the world of work*

All published by ILO/AIDS, www.ilo.org/aids

See too the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (www.unaids.org)