

2. REDUCING VULNERABILITY TO HIV



2.1 Assessing risk and possibilities for behaviour change

Vulnerability to HIV depends on lifestyle, gender and socio-economic status. This means that protecting people from HIV depends on more than just promoting the use of condoms. It also depends on building self-esteem amongst the most marginalised groups, to allow them to take control of their

sexuality in the face of oppressive political, traditional, cultural and religious values. The following exercise will enable participants to look at their own vulnerability to HIV, according to their age and gender:

Exercise 1: Looking at vulnerability to HIV

Materials:

Flip-chart paper and felt-tip pens

Procedure:

Divide the participants into the following groups;

- Married women (including widows)
- Married men including (widowers)
- Young, unmarried women
- Young, unmarried men

Ask each group to find a secluded place where they can write down all the different reasons why they think that they are vulnerable to HIV on flip cart paper. Ask someone from each group to present the results to the rest of the participants in the following plenary session.

Facilitate discussion on the following questions:

- Are the reasons for vulnerability to HIV the same for each group?
- What are the reasons for the differences?

Vulnerability to HIV is often a result of powerlessness. Therefore it cannot be simply a matter of “everyone” taking responsibility for their own behaviour in order to protect themselves from this disease. Those who hold the power within society must first change their behaviour so that those who are powerless can also begin to take control of their own lives.

Exercise 2: Looking at ways of reducing vulnerability to HIV

Procedure:

Using the same groups: married women, married men, young unmarried women, young unmarried men, ask participants to write down ways of addressing the problems that they raised in Exercise 1 so that they can protect themselves from HIV. Ask the participants to present their findings, then facilitate discussion on the following topics:

- What are the main constraints to behaviour change?
- Are these constraints the same for each group?
- Is each group willing to take responsibility for protecting themselves from HIV?
- What are the main areas of conflict?
- Can any of these areas of conflict be resolved through negotiation?
- What solutions to these problems can be included in your action plan?

The next exercise will help participants to investigate the links between power and responsibility and thus determine where the ultimate responsibility for keeping HIV out of the family/community really lies.

Exercise 3: Taking responsibility

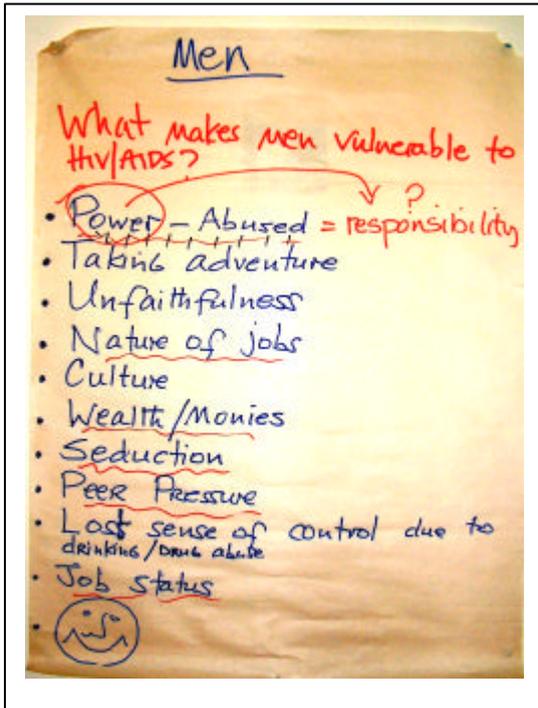
If the results from the previous exercises show that vulnerability to HIV is due to unequal power relations and wide differences in access to wealth between women and men or young and old, then facilitate discussion on ways of addressing these problems. This could involve looking at roles and responsibilities within the household and using "problem trees" to examine the causes and effects of particular problems. One way of focussing on the links between power and responsibility would be to ask participants to write down what they think the role of the "head of household" should be, on separate cards. Post these cards on the wall or other suitably visible surface, then promote discussion on who has the power to keep HIV out of the family.

If the community is open to dialogue, it may be possible to take this discussion a stage further by pointing out the inconsistencies between traditional practises and the need to take responsibility for protecting the family/community from HIV. This should help the different groups to begin negotiating changes, which could reduce the inequalities in power relations and access to wealth and thus reduce their vulnerability to HIV.

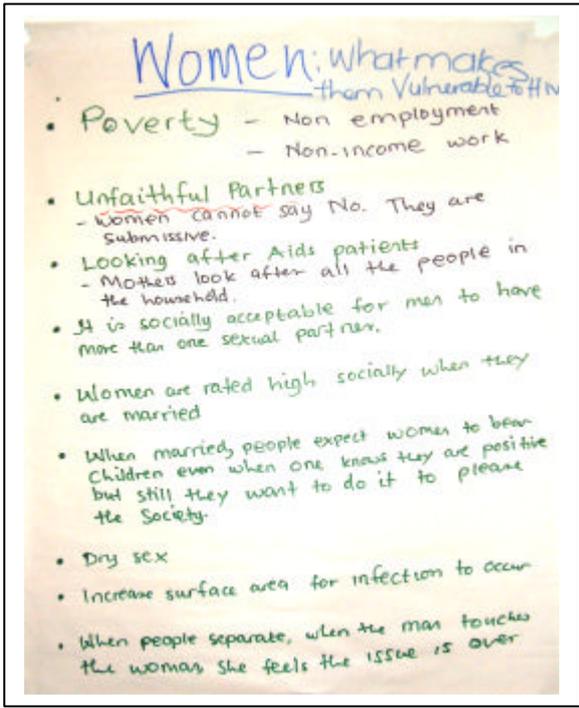
- What is the relationship between power and responsibility?
- How can we help men, women and youth take responsibility for protecting themselves and their families from HIV?
- How can we reduce conflict between these three groups?
- Put these ideas into your action plan.

Information Box 2 shows an example of the differing causes of vulnerability to HIV between married men and women in a community in Malawi and the causes and effects of the women's "powerlessness".

Information Box 2: The causes of vulnerability amongst men and women in Malawi



1. The men wrote down what makes them vulnerable to HIV and recognised that behaviour change was in their power



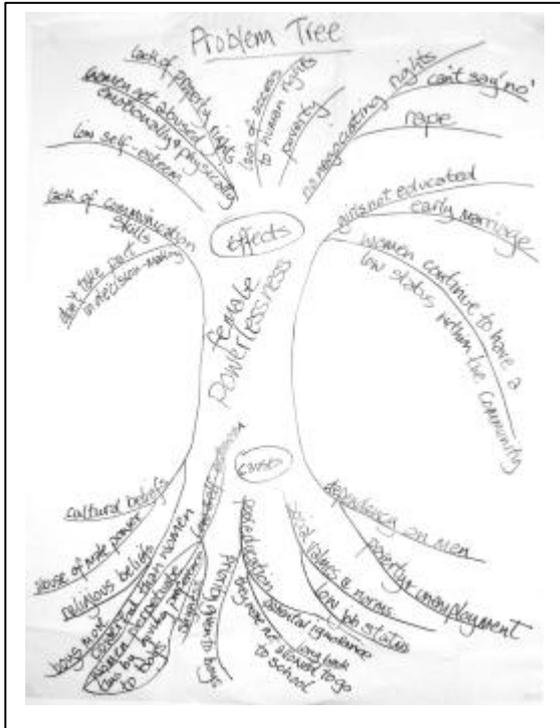
2. The women wrote down what makes them vulnerable to HIV

WOMEN

How can we protect ourselves from HIV?

ISSUE	RESPONSIBILITY
ECONOMIC - poverty	- ♀ are unable to have control on resources of family - Collectively possible.
SOCIAL - powerlessness	
CULTURAL - Dry sex - Chokola	
BIOLOGICAL - ↑ surface area of infection	

2. The women recognised that they were too powerless to protect themselves from HIV



3. The women analysed the causes and effects of their powerlessness

The cartoons shown below illustrate ways in which men and women may be at risk of contracting HIV and may be used to provoke discussion on this subject.

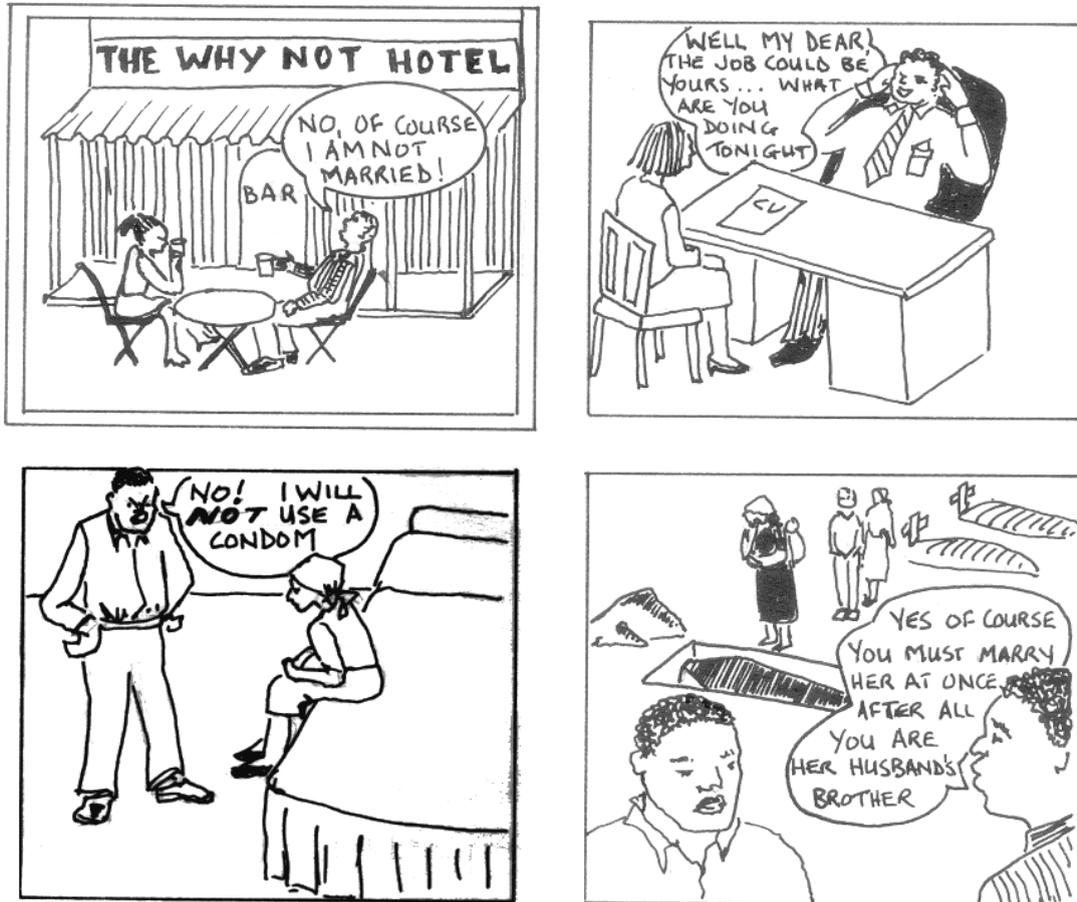


Figure 1: Who is vulnerable to HIV in these situations?

Exercise 4: Identifying possibilities for change

Ask the participants to think of ways of resolving the conflicts pictured above, without *blaming* anyone for the situation.

- What are the origins of the traditional beliefs that have created the conflicts that are pictured in these cartoons?
- Are the reasons for having these traditional beliefs still valid?
- If so, how can the traditions be modified, whilst still keeping the original values behind the belief or tradition alive?
- Put these ideas into your action plan



2.2 Action planning to reduce vulnerability to HIV

Reducing vulnerability to HIV needs to be considered at individual, family and community levels. The approach to this will depend on the ability of individuals within the family/community to accept responsibility as leaders and role models.



2.2.1 Reducing vulnerability to HIV within the family

Issues that may need to be addressed within the family are;

- The role of the head of household
- Mutual respect and faithfulness
- Sex education for children
- Condom use
- Attitudes to risky traditional practises
- Inheritance
- Conflict resolution
- Sharing food according to nutritional need (see 3.1)
- Hygiene within the household
- Responsibility for caring for the sick
- Rights and responsibilities for men, women and children

Some of these issues could be explored through role-playing and group discussions using the "Stepping-Stones" process². This process enables women and men of all ages to explore their social, sexual and psychological needs, to analyse the communication blocks they face, and to practise different ways of behaving in their relationships.

² The Stepping Stones manual can be obtained from www.talcuk.org/.

2.2.2 Reducing vulnerability to HIV within the community

Issues that need to be discussed in order to produce an action plan to reduce vulnerability within the community include;

- Attitudes to risky traditional practises (see Information Box 3)
- Community responsibilities in the care of orphans
- Promoting Positive Living amongst the poorest groups
- Conflict resolution
- Income generating activities to reduce inequalities between women and men.
- Rights and responsibilities for men, women and children
- Assessing the needs of vulnerable groups
- Linking with religious organisations

Information Box 3: Action planning by the community in Dedza, Malawi to change traditional practises that make them vulnerable to HIV

Risky practise	Proposed solution
<i>Jando</i> : Male circumcision using shared blades	Buy enough blades for everyone
<i>Chinamwali</i> : Young girls encouraged to "practise" having sex with experienced men	Use of drama, songs and slogans to educate the community on the dangers of casual sex
<i>Fisi</i> : Relatives arrange for a "surrogate" father to impregnate wife whose husband is impotent	Use of drama, songs and slogans to educate the community on the dangers of encouraging unfaithfulness or multiple sex partners
<i>Chokolo</i> : Relatives arrange for a widow to be "inherited" by her brother-in-law	Use of drama, songs and slogans to educate the community on the dangers of wife inheritance



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Exercise 5: Making a community action plan to reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

Problem	Activities planned to address the this problem	By whom?	With whom?	Planned completion date