

The Intersection of Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS

Strategic Conversation

Sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership

April 1, 2004, 11:00 – 2:00

New York City

The Center for Women's Global Leadership convened this meeting as a strategic brainstorming conversation of activists, researchers and representatives of women's human rights organizations to discuss the intersections of violence against women and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As part of our effort to deepen conversations about gender-based violence as it intersects with other issues, the Global Center decided to focus the upcoming 2004 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence on the intersection of violence with women's health, and in particular with HIV/AIDS. The meeting was an effort to bring together people to share insights and strategies about how to do this most effectively – both in general and as input to shaping this year's campaign. The meeting opened with each of the twenty-five participants introducing herself and the work she has been doing around the issue, followed by a broader conversation, the themes of which are outlined below. In addition to the enclosed list of participants, both Lynn Freedman, Associate Professor of Clinical Public Health at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, and Lori Heise, Director of the Global Campaign for Microbicides, offered general input via email that is included in the notes. The Global Center has also been in conversation with Amnesty International about making this link in their Stop Violence Against Women Campaign. The Global Center hopes to convene more conversations around this issue, in particular with the people from Washington D.C. who could not make it to New York, in order to further develop practical, concrete strategies for the 16 Days Campaign as it approaches.

Key Themes from the Discussion

Deepen political discussion of VAW & how it relates to other issues:

- Reframe/broaden the human rights context to get VAW raised in arenas where it's not discussed now.
- Need to do more than just defend progress that has already been made, should be able to move ahead on next round of issues of VAW.
- Discuss how the current political climate is affecting work on VAW.
- Context for looking at how and why onslaught on women's bodies continues in spite of work of movements and greater awareness of these issues.

Develop more discussion around the connection between violence against women and the HIV/AIDS epidemic on several levels:

- HIV/AIDS is adding new aspects to the issue of violence against women and it is important to consider **BOTH** how VAW makes women more vulnerable to HIV and also how women face different forms of violence once they are HIV positive (ie: VAW as a cause and consequence of HIV/AIDS and vice versa).
- It is important to consider the structural violence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and to link work on this to those who are seeking to expand the human rights framework to be able to adequately address it, especially as part of socio-economic rights.

- A balance needs to be found that will acknowledge the victimization of women in both VAW and HIV/AIDS, without denying their agency, especially in relation to matters of sexuality.
- Similarly, it's important to help bring visibility to the women's groups, especially of those living with HIV/AIDS, that are already doing this work.
- HIV is about ordinary people doing ordinary things; should work to avoid a framework that creates distinctions of "clean, innocent" versus "dirty, criminal" victims.
- Our focus in this area must recognize intersections of discrimination and link of VAW with sexuality.
- Discussion of the link between HIV/AIDS and VAW should include the pivots of prevalence, treatment, stigma, and prevention.

Issues to consider in linking different constituencies in this discussion:

- It is important to bring together various actors from different fields (such as social sciences, biomedical community, etc.) as well as bringing the Gender Based Violence (GBV) community together with the HIV/AIDS community.
- There was discussion of the perception by some that "the women's movement" is not addressing HIV/AIDS which led to observing that we must be careful not to talk about the women's movement or even the GBV community as monolithic; need to think about what/who is meant when "women's movement" is referenced.
- Many actors who see themselves as feminists are working on HIV/AIDS but often these groups do not have wide visibility; organizations at the grassroots level where the epidemic is strong are often making the connections and organizing around them, but lack of resources for them is often an issue.
- Both GBV activists and HIV positive women often feel uncomfortable working together because of stigma attached to both being HIV positive and to being a "feminist;" for example, some women's organizations may feel uncomfortable because it is a new issue to them or because the subject surfaces issues of sex and drug use that are uncomfortable; HIV/AIDS groups may hesitate to add the stigma of being seen as feminists to their situation.
- There are issues also of women's political participation (or lack thereof) and HIV/AIDS in terms of both the epidemic itself and how the formal policies around it are shaped; further, it can often be difficult for women with a personal tie to the issue to participate in political action because of the enormous care-taking related to HIV that mostly falls on women.

Wider institutional questions for this exploration:

- Should look at larger policy issues and government/UN responses; also relationship of NGOs doing this work with governments.

- State and international actor accountability for HIV prevention/treatment is critical but it can be difficult to assess how much one can hold governments of developing countries accountable because of their lack of financial resources, debt, etc.
- State actors, such as health care workers, that interface with women who are HIV positive and/or victims of VAW should be a group looked at in particular because of the ways in which they could address these issues.
- Also important to consider the range of non-state actors involved in HIV work, and the role of men.
- Should take into account that work on both VAW and HIV is very different from place to place, and particularly that there is a much deeper understanding of the need to address HIV in places where it is already pervasive.
- Emphasize the larger link of human rights and women's health and how women's development could serve as a long-term prevention strategy of HIV.

16 Days Campaign Suggestions

- **General approach:**
 - Role of 16 Days is to help make visible what is happening, encourage other campaigns, and raise political issues that need discussion and action.
 - Consider how campaign can go beyond just the 16 Days - what sorts of tangible, lasting structures or actions can be created.
 - Need to be strategic – what is the political end? – reinforce the political agenda of the campaign.
 - Intersectional analysis must be taken.
 - Avoid static notion of HR violations and think through human rights implications
 - Do not want to violate the spirit of the campaign that local groups decide their own priorities, but CWGL can encourage thinking and action in this area.
- **Practical suggestions:**
 - Link to UNAIDS, especially on World AIDS Day, and work with the UN AIDS/WHO Global Women's Campaign; UN Special Rapporteur on VAW to make her 2005 report on HIV/AIDS; also see International Harm Reduction Campaign.
 - Need to have a core set of overlapping messages between different campaigns – each campaign should reference every other campaign.
 - Create opportunity for a number of different organizations who do work on connection to come together in conversation from different sectors (ie: health workers, activists, feminists, HIV positive, etc).
 - Develop case studies of good examples of where people have already made these connections and what are the underlying questions their work has raised.
 - Produce think pieces on recurring themes and debates, to surface issues that underlie this work.
 - Make people aware of when relevant issues are coming before the legislature/policymakers; could coordinate with groups to write press releases.
 - Build documentation of results of policies/issues of censorship, etc.
 - Use campaign to bring together the research question of the link between HIV/AIDS, women's political participation, HIV/AIDS policy.

- Make resources available – create a list of funders and also do advocacy with funders for this work.
- Provide resources to orgs/individuals about working collaboratively.
- Get progressive ad agency to provide the visuals for the campaign.
- Communicate about actions taking place beyond the 16 Days.
- Ask what groups are seeing in their countries in terms of predominant Mother-To-Child-Transmission (MTCT) programs.
- There are commitments from the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW), International AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO) and its regional affiliates, the Global Coalition on Women and HIV, and the steering committee of the Global Campaign for Microbicides to collaborate. It has been suggested that local events could be held where domestic violence workers, women's human rights groups and HIV/AIDS service NGOs hold mutual teach-ins about each other's issues. The Global Campaign for Microbicides has partner groups and local coalitions in many developing countries/the US/ Europe plus a database of over 1500 activists worldwide working on woman-controlled prevention.