

# media & advocacy

story ideas



awareness

# Awareness Stories in the Media

The issues of HIV/AIDS and violence against women are extraordinarily relevant to people's lives. The media is always looking for new and compelling ways to write about these topics, and they welcome good ideas from community members. The fact that HIV/AIDS and violence are connected is a new idea. Many people are not aware that violence is both cause and consequence of HIV infection. This topic is rarely seen in newspapers or talked about on radio or television. That means that stories about this connection will likely be very appealing to the media. Below are a few story ideas you could suggest to journalists—stories they could research and write about to raise awareness about violence against women, HIV/AIDS and their interconnection.

## Awareness Story Idea No. 1

### THE HIDDEN CONNECTION

Violence against women is both cause and consequence of HIV/AIDS. Women are becoming infected with HIV at higher rates than men. Although, women are more biologically vulnerable to HIV infection, this is not the full reason for their higher rates of infection. Research shows that when physical, emotional, sexual or economic violence is used against women, women are less able to protect themselves from exposure to the virus. Also, when HIV positive, a woman often experiences violence, which can worsen her condition and limit her access to treatment. As a result, her HIV could more quickly develop into AIDS. Few people know or understand this connection between violence and HIV/AIDS. Well-meaning women and men are putting themselves and their partners at risk, often without understanding the consequence of their actions. This story could help others understand this connection so that women's risk for violence and HIV is reduced.

### Recommended interviews:

- Interviews with women who can share personal experiences about the connection between violence and HIV/AIDS.
- Interviews with counselors and health care providers who are witnessing the connection between violence and HIV/AIDS in their work.

## Awareness Story Idea No. 2

### THE TRUTH ABOUT POWER

In our communities and families, men often have more power than women. Usually community members accept this power imbalance as normal. However, this power imbalance leads to violence against women of all forms as well as HIV infection among women. In short, when a man uses his power over a woman, it is abuse. The realities about power are relevant to current challenges in our communities, and would make a provocative media story that examines the ways people define power, abuse power and use power for good. Through this story, people could learn about how balancing power is positive and beneficial to women and men, families and the community. The story could focus on the benefits of equal relationships, including more communication, happiness and health in our communities, and decreased transmission of HIV.

### Recommended interviews:

- Interviews with couples in the community who balance power and responsibilities in their relationships, to hear about the process of making changes in a relationship, the alternative ways of handling conflict and the benefits of non-violence.

## Awareness Story Idea No. 3

### MARRIAGE: AN HIV RISK

Many people assume that being married is protection against HIV infection, but in fact married women in many countries are most at risk. Why? Because societal standards and community norms make women vulnerable within the context of marriage. We are socialized to believe that decisions about sex are the right of a husband. Similarly, we are taught that women shouldn't refuse their husbands when they demand sex. Furthermore, because of laws and customs, women often depend on their husbands for food, money and shelter. And men are taught that they can and should use their power as men to control their wives. Control can include all forms of violence including threats of withdrawing basic needs. For a woman, the fear of angering her husband and losing basic needs often pushes her into silence and obedience, despite any perceived risks for HIV infection. These realities are deeply embedded in community norms that accept men having power over women—and they are the ultimate obstacle in HIV prevention efforts. A story on this topic would help people become aware of how marriage is not a safeguard against HIV infection and that, even in marriage, women have a right to say no to sex.

#### Recommended interviews:

- Interviews with men who made changes in their relationship once they became aware of the HIV risks for themselves and their partners.
- Interviews with women's groups addressing the challenges of women in saying no to sex.

## Awareness Story Idea No. 4

### THE STORY OF SUGAR DADDIES

Girls and young women are often coerced into sex with older men in exchange for school fees, food, shelter or other necessities. This transactional sex is a form of violence and increases a girl's chances of contracting HIV. Currently, most community members turn a blind eye to transactional sex. However, debate and discussion about this situation is increasing, and people would be keen to know more. A story on this topic would encourage community members to question these types of relationships and hold men accountable for their actions.

#### Recommended interviews:

- Interviews with girls and young women who have left a transactional sex relationship.
- Interviews with school officials who are learning about transactional sex between older men and their female students.
- Interviews with parents or guardians who have supported their daughters in avoiding or leaving a transactional sex relationship.



## Awareness Story Idea No. 5

### FORCED SEX: AN INTIMATE EXPERIENCE

When a woman and man, no matter what their ages, are in a romantic relationship, it does not mean that the woman gives up control over her body. It does not mean that the man has a right to sex whenever he wants it. However, dozens of studies from around Africa show that many women have experienced forced sex by their partners. Forced sex is also known as rape. It is when one partner physically forces the other to engage in sexual activity, and it is a leading cause of HIV infection among women. A story about forced sex would engage the attention of both female and male community members. The story could explain how forced sex does not always mean rape by a stranger, and that it often happens within intimate relationships, with someone the girl or woman knows well.

#### Recommended interviews:

- Interviews with health care workers and counselors who can speak about the forced sex experienced by girls and women in the community.
- Interviews with girls and women who have experienced forced sex and who are interested and able to share their stories.

## Awareness Story Idea No. 6

### WHY NOT THE ABCs?

The ABC prevention strategy—Abstain, Be Faithful, Use a Condom—does not work for many women. Many women do not have the power to say no to sex, they cannot stop their husbands from being unfaithful, and they cannot ask them to use a condom. However, the ABCs is often the only HIV prevention strategy people know. Community members would strongly connect with a story that explored the ABCs, including why they don't work for women, the experiences of community members and the perspectives of policy makers'. The story could show that the power imbalance between women and men is the root cause for why the ABCs do not work for women and, therefore, do not protect our communities from HIV.

#### Recommended interviews:

- Interviews with community members about their experiences trying to follow the ABCs.
- Interviews with policy makers who have recognized that the ABCs are not working and who are interested in learning more about how to address the power imbalance between women and men.



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