

## **Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS**

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Although there is some evidence that HIV/AIDS related discrimination and stigma is declining among families and communities, this continues to be a significant issue in Uganda. HIV/AIDS, is often a taboo issue, fear of disclosure leads to secrecy and denial while fair treatment of PLWHA, OVC and caregivers is preached, when a real situation arises the response is quite different. How can we facilitate attitudinal and behavioral change in this area?

**Description:** Elderly Widows Orphans Family Support (EWOFS) uses behavior change process to enable all to live a fuller life amidst and beyond the HIV/AIDS pandemic included in this approach is an anti-stigma method:

(i) Asking searching questions: How would you feel, think and act if a loved one or friend is diagnosed HIV+? Is HIV/AIDS a punishment from God? Are there people who deserve to be infected? Would you tell your spouse if you were HIV+? Inviting a positive person, who remains unknown until the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the program and then discloses, while participants note their feelings after disclosure.

(ii) The program's non-judgmental approach helps people to reveal their status voluntarily.

### **Methodology:**

- (i) Information on stigma and discrimination
- (ii) Exercises to identify and challenge stigma e.g. The "hot seat" – USAID stigma Toolkit
- (iii) Stigma codes and videos to help analyze stigma and its impact.
- (iv) New advocacy programmes – Orphans and Vulnerable Children, PLWHAs and care givers couples.

### **Lessons Learnt:**

- (i) The stigmatized more easily process emotions in neutral environments.
- (ii) Group discussions make people free, open, and honest.
- (iii) At first, anonymity is a priority. At the end, disclosure and group support is more important.

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### Recommendations:

Spread the word: - Stigma and discrimination are vices. They spread HIV/AIDS, inhibit VCT attendance and make disclosure difficult. Sensitization empowers individuals to fight these vices, starting with self – stigmatization – involves children as a target group – Use several approaches.

### Biography

Vincent Lwangai is a Director for, Elderly Widows Orphans Family Support. Elderly Widows Orphans Family Support is a registered community based organization in Sipi, Kapchorwa district, eastern Uganda. It supports children with education one on one sponsorship, HIV awareness and prevention, vocational training for school dropout.

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