

GENDER is not simply the biological or physiological differences that exist between males and females.

Those are sex differences, and can only be changed through radical medical intervention. Rather, gender is a social or cultural construct which every society develops and enforces to say how it expects certain behaviour from women and men, the different roles they should take on, and the kinds of characteristics which are acceptable.

This means that gender affects us by setting different standards within society for women and for men such as:

- roles and status
- responsibilities
- division of labour and power within the household
- sexual behaviour
- control of resources

Because these differences are socially defined, it also means that they have the potential to change.

It is critical that we consider the role of gender in HIV/AIDS because we know that the pandemic is fuelled by gender-based factors such as poverty, inequality, lack of access to education and health care, and power imbalances between women and men, girls and boys.



Atlantic Centre of Excellence
for Women's Health

*Promoting social change
through policy-based research
in women's health*

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THE Gender Factor

*Why we should be concerned
about gender when we work on
issues of HIV/AIDS*



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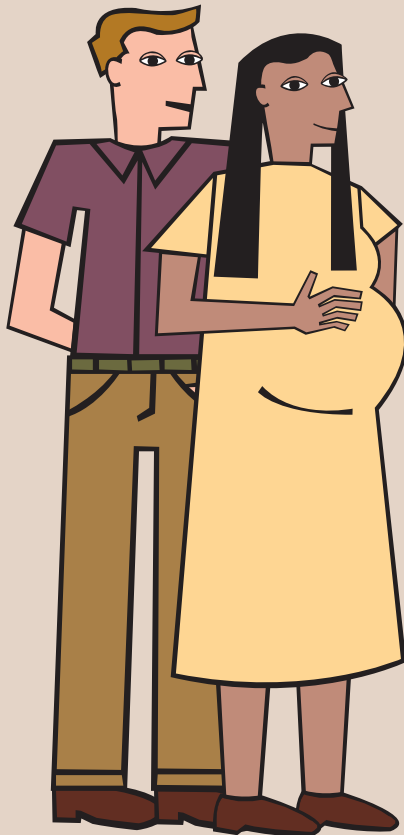
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ILLUSTRATIONS: ELLEN PAPCIAK-ROSE

Men as Partners

Juan and Maria recently got married. Now Maria is expecting their first baby. In his younger years, Juan experimented with having sex with other men. It seems so long ago now, and how could he ever tell Maria about those days? Yet, at the clinic a few days ago, the nurse asked them both if they had ever engaged in high risk behaviour. He sat quietly, but now there is no peace in his heart. As the man, he feels he should look after his family, but it seems he might be hurting them. He just doesn't know how he can talk to Maria.



Families and HIV/AIDS

At the antenatal clinic, Anita found out that she was HIV+. She was afraid to tell her husband and now is frightened when she thinks about the health of her new baby and her son. Her husband is the wage earner in the family and has always been a good provider and father. But there are stories of other women in her community who were thrown out by their husbands when they disclosed their status. She doesn't know what to do.



Young People and HIV/AIDS

Candy has been acting quiet around her mother, who suspects that she is involved with boys. Candy would like to talk to her mother about sex but it is not something ever spoken about in their house, and when it is, it is only that girls should remain virgins until they marry. However, she and her boyfriend have gotten very close and Candy is worried that she might be pregnant. She hasn't even thought about HIV/AIDS. She can't talk to her boyfriend – he would freak out, and she certainly can't talk to her mother, it would break her heart.

