

Gender as a determinant of health: local & international perspectives

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What is gender?

- Gender and Sex often confused
- Sex = biological/physical differences between males and females
- Gender = socially and culturally defined differences between men and women
- Discussions on gender are not just about women



Sex, Gender and HIV/AIDS

- **Physiological differences** place women at greater risk of infection: Delicate tissues in the female reproductive tract and high concentrations of HIV in semen make it easier for infected males to transmit the virus to their female sexual partners than vice versa
- **Social and culturally defined differences** between men and women create vulnerability by defining roles and behaviours by which people are expected to follow – how a man should act, how a woman should behave.



How does gender make us vulnerable to HIV/AIDS?

- Access to health education
- Ability to negotiate healthy behaviours
- Financial autonomy (especially income, land, credit)
- Socially-defined roles (sexual double standards)
- Access to health care services (e.g. the need to be assertive to get good care)
- Burden of caregiving

Gender-based analysis (GBA)

Principles:

- Uses sex and gender as an organizing principle or a way of looking at the world
- Provides a framework for analyzing and developing policies, programmes & legislation, and for conducting research and data collection
- A systematic process that takes place throughout the course of a policy, programme or research

Example from Nova Scotia

- “The Buddy Study” research project – interviews with young males and females
- Sexual health decision-making among young heterosexual males
- Perceptions of risk-taking
- Fear of appearing ignorant about sex
- Peers as source of information
- Need to address gender-based expectations in HIV prevention education for males

Example from South Africa

- ICAD guidelines on incorporating HIV & gender considerations into agricultural programming in high incidence countries
- Women = 60% of those infected in sub-Saharan Africa
- Women lose land and property after death of husband
- Limited livelihood options, may result in HIV risk behaviours among women/widows



GBA, HIV/AIDS and Development

Applying an HIV/AIDS lens to [development] policy formulation and programming should go hand-in-hand with incorporating gender issues, particularly with an emphasis on equal access to, and control over, land, property, credit, knowledge, agricultural inputs, and technology. (ICAD, 2004)



Gender as part of a Social Inclusion Lens

- Key determinants of health include:

Income & social status, Social support networks, Education, Employment/working conditions, Social environments, Physical environments, Personal health practices & coping skills, Healthy child development, Biology & genetic endowment, Health services, **Culture**, **Gender**

- **Culture** and **gender** have a cross-cutting, influential effect on all the other health determinants.



Limitations of GBA

- Gender not a stand-alone factor
- Need to consider intersection with ethnicity and other vulnerabilities or marginalization
- Sometimes assumed that GBA only focuses on women & girls (GBA should also include focus on needs of men & Boys)



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