



International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa

ICWEA commemorates the International Human Right Day - “Stand Up for the Human Rights for Women Living with HIV”

10th December 2018 – Kampala – Uganda: The International Community of Women Living Eastern Africa (ICWEA) joins the rest of the world to commemorate the International Human Rights Day, which is the anniversary of the day that the United Nations General Assembly adopted, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and this marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With the theme “*Stand Up For Human Rights*”, ICWEA has continued to create human rights awareness among our members so that they are able to stand up for their rights and this day we celebrate the so many achievements that we have in the past year registered including but not limited to ensuring that women living with HIV in all our diversity under the Woman Today continue to engage to ensure that human rights are at the core policy making, programming and implementation.

Violence is real in the lives of women and girls, at least 1 out of 3 women experience violence in their lifetime. It is also documented that an estimated 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner (not including sexual harassment) at some point in their lives.¹ Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.

Studies by the International Community of Women living with HIV (ICW) in India found that HIV positive women using reproductive health services were pinched, punched and scolded by health workers during procedures because of their HIV status.

While implementing a sexual reproductive Health project in Uganda, dubbed PITCH (Partnership to Inspire, Transform the Adolescent Girls and Young Women living with HIV from Uganda shared that they are bullied out of healthcare facilities, and at the end when they don't return, they are counted under lost to follow up! This is the highest form of violence against Women!!

There is evidence that women living with HIV in Eastern Africa have reported being coerced or/and forced into sterilization (The PLHIV Stigma Index Study [NAFOPHANU 2013]). While written laws and policies do not support this, the unwritten policies and practice at service delivery is to the contrary. Reasons advanced are that it is a long term family planning method

¹ World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013). [Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence](#),



and the best for women living with HIV as a means of reducing mother to child transmission of HIV and usually Health Care Providers use terms like, “*it is in your best interest as an HIV-positive woman*”. Women also report that there are some projects that give an incentive to project teams who put women on long term family planning methods.

The health consequences of violence against women can be physical, mental, and behavioral and World Health Organisation (WHO) says that women who face violence are at a greater risk of adverse mental health outcomes and they may present with depression, suicide attempts, post-traumatic stress disorder, other stress and anxiety disorders, sleeping or eating disorders among others. The more severe the abuse, the greater its impact on women’s physical and mental health. In addition, the negative health consequences can persist long after abuse has stopped.

Call to Action:

We call upon:

- **Governments**, and Ministries of Health to Enact and enforce laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination against women. Amend or repeal all laws that violate women’s rights.
- Governments to remove all financial, structural barriers that limit women and girls from accessing health care services. Removing all barriers to care must be accompanied by efforts to ensure that health services are appropriate, acceptable, and of high quality to meet the needs of women and girls living with HIV.
- The **Ministries of Health** in Eastern Africa, Gender and Human rights bodies, should take interest and monitor provision of SRHR and Family Planning Services in particular to ensure compliance to Human rights principles.
- Our countries who are also members of the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) should ensure that Medical practitioners abide by their professional codes of conduct and do not violate the rights of women living with HIV when performing procedures for prevention of pregnancy on women living with HIV who have not freely requested such procedures, or who have not given their free and informed consent.
- **Health care service providers** should treat all women living with HIV with dignity and provide them with services without any reservation.
- The **Police Officers and the courts** should be facilitated to follow up defilement cases appropriately, train more police surgeons and deploy them in different areas taking services near to the grass root. Make Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) available and within reach so that survivors of rape and defilement can access it within the recommended 72 hours of exposure to HIV.

Contact

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