

Fighting the Stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS

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In Kenya in 2016, there was an estimated 1.6 million people living with HIV, with a higher prevalence among women than men. HIV/AIDS is a disease that has and still instills a culture of fear and rejection among many in the society. This can be tracked down to the 1980s during the emergence of the HIV epidemic, which stirred up fear among people. This fear towards HIV/AIDS arose because, at the time of emergence, there was so much unknown, including its cause and mode of transmission that created misconceptions of personal risk and treatment. Despite massive nationwide campaigns by the Kenyan government and non-governmental organizations against stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS, the impact has not yet been felt in some parts of the country.

Timothy interviewed Najib, a college student in Eldoret town who hails from Garissa County. Najib admits that HIV/AIDS is greatly feared in his community and hence most cases of HIV are kept secret from their partners or families. He says that the main reason people do not seek care is fear of discrimination and stigmatization by community members because most people associate HIV with behaviors like homosexuality, promiscuity, and infidelity. As such, those who were infected find it hard to come out and seek help from the community. The situation is even worse for the children born with HIV as they are usually cared for secretly and their families keep their status unknown to others. Many of these children end up dying because of lack of access to proper medical care.

REPORT FROM 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2017 TAKEN AT 0.51085748901674, 35.268859863281

Stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS

Despite massive nationwide campaigns against stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS, the impact has not yet been felt in some parts of the country. This is highlighted in my interview with Najib, a student in one of the colleges in Eldoret town who hails from Garissa County. He says that HIV is greatly

feared in his community and most cases of HIV/AIDS are always kept secret. Infected individuals usually hide their status and hardly disclose this to their partners or families. Najib said this is due to discrimination and stigmatization by community members as most people associate HIV/AIDS with immorality on the victims' part. As such, those who were infected by their partners or born with HIV/AIDS find it hard to come out and seek help from the community. Najib said that the situation is even worse for the children born with HIV/AIDS. They are kept and taken care of indoors and their families take care to keep their status unknown to others. He highlights that most of these children end up dying because they are not given access to proper medical care. Luckily, with the intervention of some Non-governmental organizations, some have been identified and linked with needed medical care. He urged the stakeholders to create more awareness to end stigmatization.

Download full report [here](https://her.timby.org/download/?id=821) (https://her.timby.org/download/?id=821)

In another interview with our reporters, James from Uasin Gishu County narrated that he heard of HIV/AIDS for the first time in school at 10 years old as his parents and peers were not open to discussing this subject. James reports that one can get infected with HIV through engaging in unprotected sex, sharing sharp/cutting objects with infected persons and through kissing. The first time James went to get tested, he was worried being in a long distance relationship that had trust issues. He did not let the fear deter him from getting tested and so he followed through with his resolve and was tested negative. In order to avoid getting infected with the virus, he abstains or uses condoms whenever he engages in sexual activities.

REPORT FROM 24TH JULY, 2017 TAKEN AT 0.521467, 35.2785194

HIV/AIDS

James from Kapseret, Uasin Gishu County came to first hear and learn about HIV/AIDS during his days in school at age 10 when he was in Standard 6. His parents and peers were not very open about discussing this subject at this point until he got to college. James prevents himself from getting infected with the virus by abstaining or using condoms for protection whenever he engages in sexual activities. According to him, one can get infected with HIV through engaging in unprotected sex, sharing sharp/cutting objects with infected persons and interestingly, through kissing. James got really worried the first time he went to check on his status because he was in a long distance sexual relationship. But at least he knows his status though he still has trust issues with the partner. He finally urged all stakeholders to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS among sexually active youth to curb on the spread of this virus.

Download full report [here](https://her.timby.org/download/?id=582) (https://her.timby.org/download/?id=582)

Talking to James highlights the lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and the need to fill this gap while the story from Najib clearly highlights the need to curb HIV-related stigma and discrimination as this is a huge barrier to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support.

In recognizing that HIV/AIDS Stigma permeates through every social system of life, the Pediatric HIV Research Team at AMPATH developed tools to help children navigate the emotions they experience with HIV stigma. The tools include peer support groups (both in-person, and via Whatsapp), educational pamphlets distributed at the clinic, individual counseling with a trained pediatric HIV counselor, and HIV stigma films. The AMPATH Pediatric HIV researchers worked closely with a team of community advisory board members and filmmakers from Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis (IUPUI) to create 4 narrative films to help tell the common stories of HIV stigma from a child's perspective. Each [short film](#) showcases an adolescent protagonist's triumph of HIV stigma. These films expand a pre-existing curriculum called the HADITHI curriculum that helps children and adolescents with HIV-related psycho-social issues. Today, the stigma films are free and available via the website and shown in several AMPATH clinics.

Visit The Pocket Square [Project](#) website to read more on what the AMPATH team are doing to reduce the burden on HIV/AIDS Stigma and join the conversation by commenting and sharing your thoughts on this post.

