Addressing the Link Between Violence and Increased Risk for HIV: A Skills Enhancement Guide

Module II
Women, Violence, and HIV: Exploring the Link
Remember

• Build the capacity of IPV and HIV/AIDS counselors/advocates to:
  o Identify the risk for HIV and presence of IPV among women clients.
  o Integrate risk reduction and safety planning.
  o Link women to appropriate services.
What you will learn in this module

• Understand the link between violence against women and an increase in HIV risk.
• An epidemiologic overview of violence against women and an increase in HIV risk.
• Warning signs of violence against women and an increase in HIV risk.
• Consequence of violence against women.
• Barriers for women in accessing integrated violence and HIV related services.
Defining violence against women

“... any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”
Link between violence against women and HIV: Evidence from the field

- Significant overlap in prevalence of VAW and HIV.
- Intimate partner violence as a risk and consequence of HIV infection.
- Women who have violent partners are less likely to negotiate condom use and more likely to be abused when they do.
- Various adverse health effects related to intimate partner violence compromise women’s immune systems in a way that increases their risk of HIV.
Extent of link between violence against women and increase for HIV risk

• 12% of HIV/AIDS infection among women in romantic relationships are due to intimate partner violence (Sareen, et al., 2009)
• Women who experience intimate partner violence were over 3 times more likely to have a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS (Sareen, et al., 2009)
• The prevalence of intimate partner violence among women at risk for HIV may be as high as 67% (Cohen, et al., 2000)
Small group discussion

Why do you think violence may put women at increased risk for HIV?
Violence as a risk and consequence of HIV

- Violent or coerced sex increases women’s risk for HIV through physical trauma:
  - Bleeding and tearing of genital area creates passageways for HIV.

- Violence and threats of violence:
  - Limit negotiating power for safer sex.
  - Limit ability to leave/end a relationship.

- Sexual abuse as a child:
  - Leads to high HIV risk behaviors as an adult (multiple partners, unprotected sex) as an adult.

- Disclosure of HIV status:
  - Could result in increased violence (emotional, physical, sexual, economic).
Consequence of violence against women

- Physical/mental health.
- Impact on children.
- Social and economic impacts.
- Other risks:
  - Loss of housing.
  - Withdrawal of financial support.
  - Custody retaliation.
  - Withholding access to health care or medication.
Warning signs of link between violence and HIV

• Engage in risk behaviors for HIV (multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, sexual “acting out”).
• Reluctant to get tested for HIV.
• Resist disclosing a positive test result to a partner.
• Unable to adhere to an HIV medication regimen.
Barriers to integrate HIV and violence services for women

• Service providers lack of understanding of the link between violence against women and increase in HIV risk.
• Not enough resources or skills.
• Service providers discomfort discussing violence against women and risky behaviors for HIV.
• Lack of coordination and referrals with other services.
• Contrary beliefs, biases, attitudes.
What HIV and violence agencies need

- Understanding of the link between violence against women and HIV.
- Staff training and cross-training as needed.
- Adequate policies and procedures that encourages integration of HIV and violence services.
- Good risk-related information for clients.
- Increased collaboration and referral between violence and HIV agencies.