

LIVING 2008 Summit themes:

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

“We need to reclaim our body sovereignty.”

(LIVING 2008 delegate Celia Chung, San Francisco)



1 What is the issue?

With treatment and care becoming increasingly available, PLHIV are regaining their health, living longer, fulfilling lives, and planning for their futures. This includes decisions about sex, sexuality and the possibility of starting or expanding families. Despite this, there still prevails an underlying assumption that one's sexual and reproductive life stops when one becomes HIV positive. Often society at large, health care workers, decision makers and even PLHIV themselves hold this assumption.

For a person living with HIV, dealing with sex means dealing with difficult issues at vulnerable moments and in vulnerable settings. Often people living with HIV are expected to disclose their HIV status before engaging in sexual relations – in some countries it is even a legal obligation, even though this may lead to (gender-based) violence. People living with HIV are expected to initiate and engage in safe sex strategies to prevent the transmission of STIs or transmitting HIV to one's sexual partner(s). With regards to family planning, people need to be able to make well-informed decisions around conceiving, pregnancy, preventing mother to child transmission and breastfeeding.

In short, there is a host of complex issues that touch on the fulfillment of the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of PLHIV, their partners and families.

In terms of gaps, there is a range of SRHR issues for PLHIV where knowledge is insufficient and further research is needed. Among them are: the SRH needs of young people, especially young PLHIV; the needs of young people in relation to research on new prevention technologies; the effects of antiretroviral (ARV) therapies on HIV-positive young peoples' physiological development, including SRH issues; HIV-positive transgender people's SRH rights and needs; sodomy laws; discrimination of men who have sex with men (MSM) and homosexuality and its relevance with regard to epidemiological surveillance and appropriate and relevant services; and the advisability of male circumcision of PLHIV.

Also, while stigma and discrimination is becoming more subtle, it continues to be a barrier for the enjoyment of SRHR by PLHIV.

2 What are the key advocacy messages on Sexual and reproductive health and rights?

a) PLHIV are in need of empowerment regarding their SRHR

The level of knowledge and awareness regarding the SRHR of PLHIV is generally low. The provision of comprehensive sex education programmes is insufficient globally. PLHIV need more information with regard to what rights they have and how that translates into possible service provision. Participants strongly expressed that with regard to SRHR of PLHIV “knowledge means power”.

b) The SRHR discourse of PLHIV needs to be firmly anchored in the human rights approach

There are manifold violations of the SRHR of PLHIV occurring on a regular basis. In order to achieve greater awareness around

SRHR of PLHIV, as stated under a), the work in this area needs to be based on the human rights approach. PLHIV themselves need to become advocates for their SRHR and develop a sense of “civil vigilance”. The LIVING 2008 participants called for greater PLHIV involvement in SRHR organizations and programmes worldwide.

c) There is great diversity in SRHR issues of PLHIV

Although there are overarching global issues that apply to all regions, such as the low level of awareness of PLHIV regarding their SRHR, the LIVING 2008 participants recognised and emphasised the diversity of SRHR issues across different

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regions. For instance, poverty and poor nutrition make the realization of SRHR particularly difficult in Africa and parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. Concurrently, LIVING 2008 participants called for programmes tailored to the needs of specific regions and in particular stressed the need for regional advocacy activities. In general, there are no “one size fits all”

solutions for the SRHR needs of PLHIV. The SRHR needs of PLHIV are diverse. Or as one LIVING 2008 participant put it:

“The sexual and reproductive health needs and desires of PLHIV are as diverse as the epidemic itself.”

3 What are the envisaged next steps?

- Conduct a review of potentially discriminatory laws that have an impact on the SRHR of PLHIV and attempt to initiate new laws that positively promote the SRHR of PLHIV
- Institute global comprehensive sex education programmes that include the specific needs SRH of PLHIV
- Encourage regional or local initiatives fighting stigma and discrimination of PLHIV
- Promote a global media campaign – targeting PLHIV as well as the general public - to educate on and advocate for the SRHR of PLHIV
- Develop – or if an appropriate one already exists, widely disseminate - a toolkit regarding the SRHR of PLHIV
- Develop and maintain a website tracking the SRHR abuses of PLHIV with the purpose of having data for SRHR advocacy for PLHIV
- Increase the involvement of PLHIV in SRHR organizations, such as International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) worldwide by providing information on such organizations and encouraging PLHIV to join them

4 What is needed from the following audiences (in the next 12- 24 months) to address this issue and remove some of the ‘barriers’?

International Donors

Support comprehensive SRHR and SRHR / HIV linkage programmes that include the specific SRH needs of PLHIV and that involve PLHIV in their development and implementation.

Policy makers

Support the development – or if an appropriate one already exists – the dissemination – of a toolkit regarding the SRHR of PLHIV

National Programme managers

Support the involvement of PLHIV in SRHR and SRHR / HIV linkage programmes and initiatives

PLHIV Community

Increased individual and community involvement in SRHR organisations and initiatives, as well as increased advocacy in SRHR and HIV

Researchers

Increased research on various aspects of SRHR of PLHIV

5 Suggested additional reading/information on this issue

Global Consultation on the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of People Living with HIV: Consultation Report, by GNP+, ICW and Young Positives

http://www.gnpplus.net/component/option,com_docman/task,doc_download/gid,268/Itemid,53/

IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, by IPPF

<http://www.unfpa.org/swp/1997/box8.htm>

Meeting the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of People Living with HIV, by Gutmacher Institute

<http://www.gutmacher.org/pubs/gpr/09/4/gpr090417.html>

LIVING 2008: The Positive Leadership Summit was supported financially by AIDS2008, Canadian International Development Agency, Ford Foundation, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, GlaxoSmithKline's Positive Action programme, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Irish Aid, Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sidaction, Tibotec, UNAIDS, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the World Health Organization.

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