

Stigmatization and the Silence of the Church

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Stigma as Historical Phenomena

- Long history appeared with illnesses and behaviours that were different
- Leprosy, mental illness and physical deformities
- Sin and plague from God
- Jesus cures lepers- Math8:1-4, Luke: 17:11-19
- Jesus abolished division between clean and unclean

AIDS the Leprosy of 20th and 21st Century

- Stigmatizing acts like a virus attacking all elements of society
- Virus of mind and soul
- Nelson Mandela- "people are killed by the stigma surrounding everybody who has HIV/AIDS" (International AIDS Conference Barcelona, 2002)

Stigma Defined

- Unhealthy attitude discredits basic human integrity
- Person perceived as less than others
- labeling and difference
- Associating human differences with negative attributes
- Us/them mentality
- Outcome loss of social status and discrimination

Factors of Stigma and HIV/AIDS

- HIV/AIDS is a life threatening disease
- Fear of contracting AIDS
- Belief that people brought it on themselves
- Moral judgment- punishment fro God

Fear of Being Infected- Stigmatization

- Nurse only cares for AIDS patients with gloves
- Priest resists visiting AIDS patients because he will need to touch them while anointing them
- Special food utensils for patient
- Patient aware how normal patients are treated and care

Judgementalism and Rumor Mongering

- Judged that the person was immoral because of relationship of HIV and sexual activity
- Person is accused of being promiscuous
- HIV Positive patient is aware of these attitudes
- They have stigmatized and now have become self stigmatization

Family and HIV/AIDS

- Brought shame on the family
- Person has violated the social norms
- "My sister is a nurse and when my mother died, she said I should not step on the her soil as it will get AIDS."
- Unconscious self stigmatization of the family

Gender and Culture

- Women blamed for problems in the family
- Women accused of bringing AIDS into the family
- Women fear disclosure because of violence and rejection
- If child has AIDS, mothers fault
- Woman cannot negotiate sexual issues with husband
- Young girls are higher risk of infection

Health Institutions

- AIDS Patients not offered same care
- Breach of confidentiality
- HIV Testing without consent
- Dumping Patients
- Healthcare workers spend less time with AIDS patients- (UNAIDS- Uganda 2001)

Community Stigmatization

- Family not allowed to rent housing
- Children stigmatized by other children
- Children told bad things about their dead parent(s)
- Children feel that they are being blamed for their parents

Religious Institutions

- AIDS a punishment from God
- "Good Catholic/Bad Catholic attitude"
- Luke 6:42- Remove the plank from your own eye

Overall impact of Stigma on person

- Negative impact on clinical care
- Negative impact on emotional life
- Negative impact on spirituality
- Negative impact on economics
- Negative impact on relationships

Clinical Care

- Delayed access to care
- Health is compromised
- Leads to earlier death
- Stigma causes HIV negative people to be infected with TB

Psychological Damage

- Feel rejected by family
- Rejection felt in community and religion
- Loss of self esteem
- Lack of love
- Feel alone
- Depressed
- Alienated from self, others and God

Chief Justice

- Acts like the Chief Justice condemning people to death
- Not just an African reality
- Stigma is example of “culture of death”

AMECEA Response to Culture of Death

- How do we respond all the way to the village?
- Stigma is an example of “structures of sin”
- Structures of sin consolidate and become more difficult to remove

Stigma and Religious

- Priest, Brothers and Sisters are afraid to seek help if HIV Positive
- Are there clearly defined policies for religious who are HIV positive?
- Has policies been publicly promulgated?
- No public policy leads to unconscious stigmatization

HIV Testing and Candidates

- Is HIV testing part of entrance or part of final vows approval?
- Are there clearly defined exclusionary issues for example academics, psychological, medical or spiritual?
- Are there stated public policy concerning HIV testing?
- How do you handle HIV Positive candidates?

HIV/AIDS and Lay Personnel

- Are personnel policies transparent?
- Do you test new workers for HIV? If so why?
- HIV testing is issue of social justice
- What is policy for HIV positive staff?
- Clear policy lowers stigma and opens up care options.

Communicating Moral Values

- How do we communicate moral values without stigmatizing?
- God condemns the sin but not the sinner
- Need to work on developing good clear messages

Knowing your HIV status- VCT

- VCT foundation of prevention and intervention
- People afraid of testing because of stigma
- If negative stay negative, if positive get clinical care
- Bishops and Church leaders major influence for HIV testing

HIV Testing and Marriage

- What is Church policy on HIV testing before marriage?
- Can there be true consent without knowing the HIV status of the partner?
- How do we communicate non stigmatizing message about testing?

Action Plan- National Level

- Justice and Peace should be relating to Health and Family Life dept on stigma.
- Campaigns against stigma on national radio and newspapers
- Stigma as main topic of Lenten Campaign

Action Plan- Metenoia

- Change of heart in dioceses, deaneries and parishes
- Parish groups do discussions, plays etc on stigma
- Realization that each of us has been stigmatized
- Experiencing our own hurt by stigma leads to attitude change
- Liturgical Seasons

On-Going Campaign

- Not a one time activity
- Needs Planning
- Must be public
- Luke 8:17- "No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or put it under a bed. No, it is put on a lamp stand so that people might see the light..."

Conclusion

“Now is the time for a new “creativity” charity, not only for ensuring that help is effective but also close to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.”

Pope John Paul II- Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte

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