

INTERCONNECTIONS 21

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Activity 5: Women and HIV/AIDS

Purpose: To raise awareness of the impacts that HIV/AIDS has on women.

Standards:

Social Studies: NCSS standards:

V: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

IX: Global Connections

X. Civic Ideals and Practices

English Language Arts: NCTE standards

1: Reading for perspective

4: Communication skills

12: Applying language skills

Materials:

Activity 5 Student Material: Women and HIV/AIDS

Description:

1. Distribute the handout “Women and HIV/AIDS” for students to read. Students may wish to do further research on some of these issues.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group pick one of the issues relating to women and HIV/AIDS and write a short skit, dramatizing how that issue might either make it more likely that a woman would contract HIV, or showing the special burdens and challenges faced by women once they are infected with HIV/AIDS.
3. After the skits have been presented, encourage students to consider how the issues that place women at a disadvantage in dealing with HIV/AIDS might be addressed, to insure that women’s basic human rights are upheld.

Follow-up activity:

Older students may wish to examine the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This can be found at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/e1cedaw.htm>. Review the “Women and AIDS” handout in light of this Convention. What rights of women are being violated as they attempt to deal with the HIV/AIDS pandemic?

Activity 5 Student Material

Women and HIV/AIDS

According to the UN, the proportion of women living with HIV/AIDS has risen steadily in recent years. In 1997, 41% of HIV-positive adults were women. Three years later, that figure had risen to 47%. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, an estimated 12.2 million women carry the virus, compared to 10.1 million men. Women are often infected at an earlier age than men.

For women, protecting themselves from HIV/AIDS and dealing with infection when it occurs, can present special challenges that men do not face.

Vulnerability: In many countries, girls and women have lower social status. If they learn that their role is to defer to men, they may not be able resist pressure to engage in sexual activity, or to choose safer sexual practices that would protect them from HIV/AIDS.

Sexual violence: Many new cases of HIV infection are due to gender-based violence in homes, schools, or the workplace. In countries affected by war, women and girls may be targeted for rape and sexual abuse. This increases their chances of acquiring HIV.

Sexual practices of men: Even women who are in long-term stable relationships may be at risk of acquiring HIV, if social norms tolerate, or subtly encourage men to have multiple sexual partners.

Discrimination in health care: In countries where men are more likely than women to be admitted to health care facilities, women are less likely to receive prevention information and treatment. Families may spend more money on health care for males than for females.

Discrimination in education: Girls are less likely than boys to attend and complete school. Without basic literacy skills, they are less likely to be able to find and use information on HIV prevention. In some parts of the world, social norms discourage the sharing of sexual health information with women.

Mother-to-child transmission of HIV: It is particularly important for pregnant women to have accurate information on HIV and AIDS because if they don't get

tested for HIV, they can unwittingly pass on the virus to their babies during childbirth, or through breastfeeding.

AIDS widows: Women who become widows when their husbands die of AIDS may face social stigma, as well as being HIV-positive themselves. They are more likely to live in poverty. In some countries, women do not have the right to inherit their husbands' money or property, leaving them impoverished and vulnerable.

Women as caregivers: The burden of caring for ill family members generally falls upon girls and women. Women need information and education in order to care protect themselves while caring for a person with AIDS. Too often, girls in school are expected to drop out in order to care for an ill parent or younger siblings, or to work to help support the family.

READ MORE! Sources of information on Women and HIV/AIDS:

United Nations Fact Sheets:

http://www.un.org/ga/aids/ungassfactsheets/html/fsgender_en.htm

World Health Organization (WHO) Fact Sheets:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs242/en/>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs247/en/>

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=27

http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=30