

# WHY POPULAR BELIEFS ARE POPULAR

12  
EXERCISE



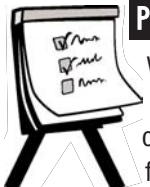
## OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:  
Assess popular beliefs and their  
impact on our thinking about  
HIV/AIDS



## TIME

1 hour



## PREPARATION

Write out different  
popular beliefs on  
cards, such as the  
following.

- HIV is caused by sleeping with a woman who has had a miscarriage or abortion
- HIV is caused by witchcraft
- The partner who falls sick first is the person who got infected with HIV first who “brought HIV into the family”
- Sex with a virgin/young girl cleanses you of HIV
- Every time you have sex with another person your viral load goes down
- If one partner is HIV positive, the other must also be HIV positive
- Holy water can cure AIDS (Ethiopia)

## ACTIVITIES

### *Analysis and Drama Making*

### **EXPLORING POPULAR BELIEFS**

Divide into small groups and let each group select one card.

#### **Group task**

#### **What are the reasons or thinking behind this belief?**

- Whose interests are served by this saying or belief?
- How does this belief lead to HIV stigma?
- Create a *drama* to show how this belief is accepted and how it influences people’s thinking.

#### **Report back**

Ask each group to present their drama.

Then discuss: “How can we challenge or change this belief?”



## EXAMPLES

### **Witchcraft**

Provides an alternative explanation for AIDS illness, one that does not involve blame or stigmatization. The blame is shifted to whoever is doing the bewitching. Traditional doctors provide a respectful, welcoming approach: they do not judge or condemn, listen and provide counseling, and provide services in non-public spaces—so there is no stigmatizing by others.

**Belief which attributes HIV to sex with a woman who has miscarried shifts the blame from the man to the woman—she has miscarried so she is at fault.**

[Traditionally, however, this belief was used as a form of protection for women—this device allowed them to be free from sex for a period so they could heal.]

### **“Whoever Gets Sick First Gets the Blame.”**

This saying is often used by men to shift the blame of bringing HIV into the relationship to their partners.

### **“Sex with a virgin cures HIV.”**

This belief is now used by men to justify having sex with young women and avoid safe sex practices. It puts young girls under tremendous pressure and increases their risk of getting HIV from older men.

### **“Every time you have sex with another person your viral load goes down.”**

This is a convenient way for men or women to avoid facing responsibility around sex and justify the practice of having many sexual partners.