

STIGMA AROUND HAVING CHILDREN

18
EXERCISE



OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- Understand the different pressures on PLHAs about whether to have children or not
- Explore how different stigmas play a role in these pressures



TIME

30 mins

ACTIVITIES

Role Play and Discussion

PLHAS HAVING CHILDREN

Ask participants to perform the following role play as a group.

Ask a couple to stand in the middle of the circle. Explain that they have been married for two years and have had no children. The other participants are neighbors who form a circle around the couple. They are talking about the couple and each make one statement commenting on the fact that they have not had children. Use the ideas below or make up your own.

EXAMPLES

- They have been married a long time but she never gets pregnant.
- They are unlucky. I've heard they cannot have children.
- It's the women's fault. I've heard she is barren.
- I've heard it's because of AIDS. If you get AIDS, you can't have children.
- If the wife has HIV, she may pass the virus to her child.
- If she gets pregnant, she will get weak and die quicker.
- If they have HIV, they shouldn't have children anyway.
- Yes, they'll just leave orphans and increase the burden on their families.
- Maybe they are bewitched.



Discuss

- What were the neighbors saying? Why?
- How did the couple feel in the middle of the circle?
- What is the stigma in this situation?
- Do you think PLHAs should have children?

Summary

- There are two competing stigmas: not having children and having HIV/AIDS. This produces contradictory messages for women:
- In Africa, children are highly valued and the stigma for a woman of not having children is often greater than that of being judged because of HIV/AIDS
- When PLHAs do have children they often get labeled as irresponsible and careless, yet many do not make the decision lightly.
- There are ways now to minimize the mother to child transmission.