

# FAITH HEALING AND TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Some PLHAs turn to faith healing and traditional medicine as a way of finding hope



## OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- Understand why faith healing holds hope for some PLHAs
- Recognize the limitations in traditional medicine in “curing” HIV/AIDS



## TIME

1 hour



## MATERIALS

Picture of PLHA going to traditional doctor (A22)

## ACTIVITIES

### Story Discussion

### FAITH HEALING

Ask one participant to read the story below:

One day, after several tests at the clinic, Martha discovered that she was HIV positive. She never told anybody her results. She went to see her priest who prayed for her and gave her holy water and she believed she was healed. A year later she got married. Soon after the marriage she had a baby who became sick. When she took the baby to the doctor, he said that maybe the child has HIV.

Ask participants to discuss the following questions:

- What happened in the story?
- What made Martha believe she was healed?
- Do you know of people who have gone for healing? What happened?
- What role does faith-healing play in helping us cope with stigma?

### Summary

The messages we get from faith healers help to strengthen us but if we believe we are healed, we may be deceiving ourselves.

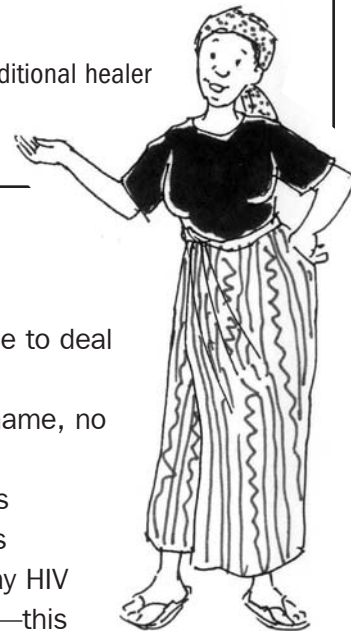
### BLAMING WITCHCRAFT MEANS LESS STIGMA

Show picture of a PLHA consulting a traditional healer. Discuss:

- What do you see in the picture?
- Why do some people believe that their illness is caused by witchcraft?
- Why is it easier to accept this explanation than the HIV explanation?

- Some traditional healers claim they can cure AIDS so they offer hope, cure or a solution.
- They provide an alternative explanation for the AIDS illness, one that does not involve blame. People don't have to worry about being stigmatized.
- Most traditional healers do not practice stigma—they provide a respectful, welcoming approach, without judging or condemning. They often blame witchcraft, not the patient. "It is not your fault. It is the fault of the uncle who is bewitching you."
- Traditional healers provide their services in non-public spaces—so there is no stigmatizing by others. Fewer people know you have visited the traditional doctor.
- Modern medicine (clinic or hospital), on the other hand, does not offer a cure, tells people they are going to die, and practices stigma—so many people are turning to traditional healers for a more hopeful message and one that does not blame them.

Clinic	Traditional Healer
<p>Entry fee—no money, no treatment                      No comfort—only blame/stigma                      Condemns PLHAs—reckless behavior                      Harsh treatment by health staff—fear physical contact and take this out on PLHA                      No/little psycho-social support                      If treatment was better, family would not have gone to the traditional healer</p>	<p>Fee more expensive                      No shame or stigma                      Friendly and welcoming                      Offer hope—it is not your fault—you are bewitched by someone else.                      Psycho-social support                      Close to people's lives—traditional healer lives in the community</p>



### Summary

- Witchcraft makes it easier for people to deal with the blame and the shame.
- Witchcraft involves no blame, no shame, no stigma.
- The blame is assigned to whoever is "bewitching", "It's your uncle who is jealous of you." So it is easier to say HIV is caused by "witchcraft," not AIDS—this avoids stigma.