



LET'S GET TALKING ABOUT THE WORLD YWCA AND ICW'S  
FOURTH KEY CHALLENGE  
AT THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT, KENYA 2007



The World YWCA and ICW say  
Let's Talk About: 'Stigma and Discrimination'

We will hear these words many times in Nairobi. HIV positive women challenge us to think deeply about them.

Stigma and discrimination arise because of our HIV positive status and from gender inequalities. When HIV positive women are denounced or branded negatively because of our HIV status, that is stigma. When HIV positive women are discriminated against it reveals social and individual prejudice and bias.

What causes stigma and discrimination? There are many causes. Ignorance and fear stoke their fires. Excluded or despised identities or practices such as homosexuality, sex work, or injecting drug use attract reproach and prejudice. At the base, gender, race, and class inequalities shore up more powerful groups' abilities to stigmatise and discriminate against HIV positive people. And HIV positive women often end up at the bottom of any pile.

- *HIV positive IV drug users are doubly stigmatised. They have no resources and live in great hardship. (ICW member, China)*
- *She started talking to other women about being a lesbian. People got to hear about it. One day four men turned up at her house shouting, 'What are you talking about? Sex is meant to be between men and women, not between women.' Then they raped her. (ICW member, Burkina Faso)*

HIV positive women experience many different forms of these including exclusion and violence from society, our communities and sadly, even our families and partners. We may be abused in our homes, at work, or in hospitals, by our families, work colleagues, bosses or health care workers.

- *After one woman was diagnosed someone told. After that the neighbours would not walk close to her house. No one in the whole village would talk to her. (ICW member, China)*

Stigma and discrimination spread wide ripples wherever their destructive impacts are felt. They make it difficult or impossible to access health care and treatment. They lead to stress and anxiety that sap energy, fuel depression and self-blame. When stigma and discrimination are rife HIV positive women are much more vulnerable to illness, harm and even death.

- *Maybe when young mothers go to service providers they don't get the services, which they expect – they are stigmatised within the health services as a prostitute or a promiscuous... they gossip about them and mock them. (Young ICW member, Tanzania)*

Only when we care about ourselves and stand together to achieve our human rights can we end the stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV and AIDS.

- *To me, positive living means loving myself – being happy mentally and physically. It means strengthening my self-confidence and building my self-esteem. (Young ICW member, India)*

**We want** policy makers, health professionals, government bodies, and grass roots organisations to take on the many different meanings of our lives. We want the International Women's Summit on HIV and AIDS to make a genuine and deep attempt to listen to us, learn from us, work with us. Let's get talking.

- *If there was no stigma surrounding HIV, there would be less fear. If there was less fear, there would be less ignorance. If there was less ignorance, there would be less denial. (Young ICW member, Zimbabwe)*

**Talking point:**

- How can we challenge stigma and discrimination in our communities, organisations and families?

**The World YWCA and ICW challenge: Are young HIV positive women being included at every level in all discussions and planning around challenging stigma and discrimination?**

To find out more visit our websites: [www.icw.org](http://www.icw.org) and <http://www.worldywca.info>