

## A PRESENTATION ON KNOWLEDGE BARRIERS AGYW FACE IN ACCESSING HIV/STIs SERVICES IN OUR COMMUNITY.

Presented by Sylvie WIYSANYUY

Knowledge is power itself as sir Francis Bacon highlighted in his work, *Meditations Sacrae* in 1597. Globally, AGYW face difficulties in accessing HIV and STIs services. With a fragile system, high rate of unemployment, in Cameroon particularly, young girls experience difficulties in accessing sanitary wealth or managing their menstrual period, and some do not even know the different preventive measures in fighting against HIV and STIs. According to UNAIDS fact sheet of 2021, six in seven new HIV infections among Adolescents aged 15-19yrs are among young girls and women. Around 4200 AGYW aged 15-24 yrs became infected with HIV every week in 2020. It is important to note that AGYW perish in our communities because of lack of knowledge about their SRH and the services attached to it.

From the above facts, we can see that despite the effort being put in place by the different bodies, to create awareness, a lot is still at hand to be done, and one of the first ways is through disseminating of the information to the ends of the country through sensitization, organization of workshops for AGYW through which they will partake in and gain more knowledge, free screening, through broadcasting of tv programs on the the diseases, through teaching as a subject on its own in schools, through rural campaigns and door to door discussions by peer educators or community actors especially in rural zones, and finally, through encouragement of dialogue between parents and their Adolescent girls at home.

For instance, the ministry of public health being directly involved in the epidemic has a major role to play in eradicating HIV infections and transmissions among AGYW. How often does this sector carry out door to door campaigns especially at the rural communities? How often do they organize workshops or seminars for AGYW to partake in and learn HIV preventive methods, how often do they share condoms which is one of the common ways in preventing HIV and STIs infections and transmissions? (personally I have never experienced it be it in town or at the rural setting, perhaps they do it but the information do not go far as targeted initially) Much is still to be done at that level to make sure more awareness is created among AGYW for it is clearly stated in the NSP that this sector should focus on the medical care of PLHIV, PMTCT and procurement and supply management of commodities.

Again, we also have the ministry of education which is made up of basic, secondary, youth and civic and higher education respectively whose primary role according to the NSP is to

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transfer knowledge about HIV at all levels of education in the form of a course and not as a topic. It is rather unfortunate that this policy is not fully implemented because we have noticed that most schools teach it more as a topic maybe during civics or biology lessons or religious studies, equally some schools do not have HIV clubs which is one of the ways AGYW in different schools can acquire knowledge as far as HIV and STI is concerned and help reduce prevalence's among the latter. (I personally interviewed some AGYW of GBSS EKOROZOK Nkolbison through which I enquired about their knowledge on post exposure prophylaxes and the different services they know related to their SRH, and preventive methods, but 95 percent did not give any concrete response and did not know their SRH rights as well. Also in the university level, nothing on HIV/STIs is being thought right from level 1 to doctorate, I personally experienced it.)

Also, the ministry of post and tele communication is responsible for disseminating information through the different communication channels as stated in the NSP but how often do they post messages on HIV in their face book pages or tweeter or even broadcast debates or films talking about the disease? It's not like they are not trying but they need to intensify the creation of awareness among AGYW through the different means available at their disposal.

Councils, how often do you organize sensitization campaigns at your different spheres of influence? Especially during youth weeks, or HIV weeks. You have your own role to play to make sure HIV infections and transmissions reduces among AGYW of your locality. How often do you send your agents to carry out door to door campaigns for AGYW especially? Personally, I have never had such a visit and have never been aware of any sensitizations probably because the message has never gotten to my entourage. You should make sure the agents you send in the field do their work properly for it is a life threatening disease. (after carrying out investigations, we noticed that some councils like that of Yaounde 7 does not have a sensitization cabinet because I went there and asked and no concrete response was given where as it ought to be)

More so, MINAS/MINPROFF still need to intensify their mobilization and sensitization methods of creating awareness among AGYW in our community. We rarely have such encounters to permit AGYW learn more on HIV and their Sexuality and preventive majors,

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especially at the rural settings. For instance, in my village, kumbo I or the concerned have never been part of such events whereas this ought to be implemented as one of the ways to reduce HIV infections among AGYW by 2022 as stated in the NSP. Condoms are not freely shared either which is one of the preventive methods.

Finally, as parents and guardians, how often do you caution your children especially the young girls on HIV infections and transmissions? Most parents take this as a taboo and are too shy to talk about sexuality to their children in the name of 'I don't want to spoil my child' she is too young for this' how will u feel if your child brings condom home from school? Hmmm sure you will skin the child alive where as you instead need to educate her the more on this. While growing up my mum never told me any of this, instead when I saw my first flow, she told me to stop playing with boys whereas she should instead talk to me about HIV and STIs, its preventive methods etc. maybe she did not know all of that.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO BODIES RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING POLICIES IN FAVOR OF AGYW IN OUR COMMUNITY.**

Firstly, the ministry of public health should organize more seminars, conferences, workshops, sensitization campaigns if possible through NGOs like HOVUCA, to make sure AGYW access knowledge and prevent future infections. Again, this sector should recruit more health personnel's and get them well trained and integrated in different localities alongside with community actors where they will carry out door to door sensitization.

Secondly, the ministry of education should simply integrate HIV lessons in the curriculum at all levels of education especially at secondary and higher education respectively, and rights of AGYW should be thought as well. Also, specific teachers should be trained at the different Teachers training schools and later integrated at the different educational milieus where they will transfer the knowledge about HIV and STIs to the target population thus reducing HIV infections and transmissions rate among AGYW which is the target to be met. Again, HIV clubs should be created and encouraged at the different educational milieus where AGYW will partake in its activities and gain more knowledge as far their SRH is concerned.

Thirdly, MINAS/MINPROFF should organize more seminars, workshops to empower AGYW especially at the rural areas for they are more ignorant about HIV/STIs infections and transmission methods, of course condoms should be shared to the latter.

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Fourthly, the ministry of post and tele communication on her side should intensify the broadcasting of programs related to HIV and STIs and often encourage debates, press talks, and programs like 'ENTRE NOUS JEUNES' and magazines like 100% jeunes as well. This sector should use their online forums to post messages on HIV/STIs infections and preventive measures to as well reduce its prevalence among AGYW.

To add, the mayors at the different councils should organize sensitization and workshops for AGYW especially during youth week or HIV week with the aim of creating awareness among AGYW and reducing HIV/STIs infections.

Finally, parents should be more open to talk about everything to their adolescent girls, they should help them understand HIV/STIs infections and transmissions methods and of course teach them preventive methods so that they won't be a victim to this handicapping disease, parents should live taboo aside and save their young girls future.

If the above recommendations are being taken into consideration, we think our country will reach the target of reducing the rate of infections and transmissions among the key population especially the AGYW as stated in the NSP of 2018-2022.

Thanks for your kind attention.