

# Policy Brief, 2015

## Inclusion of HIV Messages for Older Persons in the National HIV Behavioural Change Communication Programmes

### I. Introduction

Uganda was one of the countries that were affected with AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, but has successfully gained international reputation for combating HIV&AIDS. The prevalence of HIV in Uganda fell from 18% in the late 1980s to as low as 6.4% in 2005 (MOH, 2006). In 2011, the prevalence rose to 7.3% (MOH, 2012) which meant that Uganda is one of the few countries in the World where the prevalence is rising despite the various interventions being implemented. The UNAIDS put the number of new infections at 150,000 in 2011, up from 120,000 in 2004 (PEPFAR, 2014) and these excludes older persons. According to Uganda AIDS Commission, approximately 80% of HIV infections arise from heterosexual transmission, 20% from mother-to-child infection and less than 1% from blood-borne infection. Nationally, only 36% of women and 43% of men aged 15-49 have a comprehensive knowledge of HIV&AIDS(MOH, 2012).

### II. Key Concerns

**HIV messaging among Older Persons:** Older persons and the general population don't have similar levels of knowledge about HIV&AIDS due to variations in messaging. It is clear that there is lack of HIV messages targeting older persons. This means that other factors are also likely to be responsible for the difference in knowledge and prevalence of HIV in the general population and that of older persons. Sexual behaviour, living conditions and the lifestyle of older people especially those who have money are some of the factors that make older people particularly vulnerable. While as, some older persons can read and write, many of them are very illiterate as they can neither read nor write.

**Accessibility of HIV messages by old persons:** Access to current HIV messages is not age friendly because they predominantly target the youth and married couples, and are put in places that are not favourable to older persons for example at health facilities. Many of the messages are produced in English both print and broadcast yet many of the older persons have disabilities. The broadcast is done on radios and Televisions which are not accessible by older persons yet there are community radios which are easily accessible by them.

**Inclusion of HIV messages for older persons:** The prevalence of HIV among older persons is not known because there are NO studies conducted targeting older persons. The Uganda AIDS indicator survey collects data on older people but it is not analysed. This makes it hard to have HIV messages targeting older persons. Some of the studies done by civil society organisations on HIV and older persons have found common sexual behaviours of older persons with the general public and these included: having multiple sex partners; failing to use condoms; sex under the influence of alcohol and cross generational

**"We older persons are still sexually active and the more we grow older, the more you pick interest in young ladies", FGD respondent, Katwe.**

**"Government has totally neglected us in HIV messaging yet they are many older persons in this country. There is an urgent need to implement the National policy for older people", FGD Respondent, Makerere Kivulu**

sex. But with all that, there are no clear HIV messages targeting older persons from both government and non-state actors. A study by URAA and HelpAge revealed that 64% are sexually active and 91% had never used a condom during sexual intercourse (URAA and HelpAge, 2009), 63% of them take care of orphans and vulnerable children including those with HIV (MGLSD SAR, 2009).

The findings on HIV messaging for older persons are both from government and it's implementing partners and have been derived from HIV literature and consultations made, and they include;

- Scarcity of national data on older persons living with HIV
- There is NO research conducted to ascertain the population of older people living with HIV and where data is collected like the Uganda AIDS Indicator Survey, it is not analysed.
- Many HIV studies and data collection concentrate on young people, women and married couples in their reproductive age groups hence no attention is paid to older persons.
- No clear HIV behavioural change programmes targeting older persons despite their being sexually active.

### III. Recommendations

From the analysis of the different HIV policies, strategies and behavioural change programmes, it is evident that there are NO clear HIV&AIDS messages targeting older persons despite the fact that they are sexually active and practice cross and generational sex. The HIV Care, Prevention and Treatment Advocacy group for older persons recommends the following;

#### To Government

- HIV messages should be produced in a language that is age friendly.
- HIV communications should target community radios within older persons reach.
- Facilitate community led dialogues for older persons.
- National HIV Messaging Committee should **NOT** clear any messages that are not age friendly.
- A nation-wide census for older persons living with HIV in Uganda should be conducted.
- Implementation of HIV interventions in the National Policy for Older Persons should roll out.
- Establish Older Persons Friendly Corners with Counsellors at Health facilities with HCT Services.

#### To Implementing Partners

- Using appropriate communication channels for campaigns that are user friendly to older persons.
- Need to train HIV champions (retired health officials) for peer-to-peer education and handling of older persons
- Need for regular sensitisation campaigns targeting older persons.
- All partner programmes should include a component on HIV messaging for older persons.
- Sensitising the media on HIV reporting for older persons.

#### To Uganda Reach Aged Association and HelpAge International

- Roll out their Social Behavioural Change and Communication 2011 Handbook.
- Strengthen Older Persons Social Behavioural Change Communication Groups.