

## Module 6:

# Reporting on HIV

### In this module you will learn:

- Preferred terminology for reporting on HIV
- How to avoid language that stigmatises people

### HIV: in the beginning

Since HIV was identified in the early 1980s, much of the media coverage has been surrounded by stigmatisation, discrimination and stereotypes. Because the most common form of transmission of the disease is through unprotected sexual intercourse a sense of embarrassment and shame has become associated with HIV, rather than an acceptance that it is simply an infection – just like any other – to which there should be no shame attached.

When HIV was first identified in the United States, the gay community was the most impacted. As a community that did not live openly because of societal repression, they were often denied a rational response from medical authorities addressing the disease's impact.

Moral-based arguments were attributed to the spread of the disease – implying those that contract it are somehow sinful and deserving. Even the distribution of condoms as a

preventative measure was met by moral outrage. This drove people who had contracted the virus underground and made it hard to disseminate information about sex and how to curtail transmission, which contributed to the spread of the disease.

As HIV grew to a global epidemic, the stigmatisation has remained and marginalised communities around the world are the most impacted. Today, sex workers, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, and the transgender population remain disproportionately affected by the virus. And the stigma surrounding their life choices and behaviours contributes to the wider stigma associated with HIV.

As a result, the disease continues to spread and access to treatment in marginalised communities remains a challenge. This is why it's extremely important to be sensitive to the issues of stigmatisation in your writing.



Condom demonstration with sex workers in Bophaleakkoun, Cambodia

## UNAIDS terminology guide

The table below provides a quick guide of UNAIDS' summary of preferred terms.

Past terminology	Preferred terminology
HIV/AIDS; HIV and AIDS	<b>Use the term that is most specific and appropriate in the context</b> to avoid confusion between HIV (a virus) and AIDS (a clinical syndrome). Examples include 'people living with HIV', 'HIV prevalence', 'HIV prevention', 'HIV testing and counselling', 'HIV-related disease', 'AIDS diagnosis', 'children orphaned by AIDS', 'AIDS response', 'national AIDS programme', 'AIDS service organisation'. Both 'HIV epidemic' and 'AIDS epidemic' are acceptable, but 'HIV epidemic' is a more inclusive term.
AIDS virus	There is no AIDS virus. The virus that causes AIDS is the human immunodeficiency virus ( <b>HIV</b> ). Please note that 'virus' in the phrase 'HIV virus' is redundant. Just use 'HIV'.
AIDS-infected	No one is infected with AIDS; AIDS is not an infectious agent. AIDS describes a syndrome of opportunistic infections and diseases that can develop as immunosuppression deepens along the continuum of HIV infection from acute infection to death. Avoid 'HIV-infected' in favour of <b>person living with HIV</b> .
AIDS test	There is no test for AIDS. Use <b>HIV test</b> or <b>HIV antibody test</b> . For early infant diagnosis, HIV antigen tests are used.
AIDS victim	Use <b>person living with HIV</b> . The word 'victim' is disempowering. Use AIDS only when referring to a person with a clinical diagnosis of AIDS.
AIDS patient	Use the term 'patient' only when referring to a clinical setting. Use <b>patient with HIV-related illness (or disease)</b> as this covers the full spectrum of HIV-associated clinical conditions.
Risk of AIDS	Use ' <b>risk of HIV infection</b> ' or ' <b>risk of exposure to HIV</b> ' (unless referring to behaviours or conditions that increase the risk of disease progression in an HIV-positive person).
Commercial sex work	This says the same thing twice in different words. Preferred terms are <b>sex work</b> , <b>commercial sex</b> , or the <b>sale of sexual services</b> .
Prostitute or prostitution	These words should not be used. For adults, use terms such as <b>sex work</b> , <b>sex worker</b> , <b>commercial sex</b> , <b>transactional sex</b> , or the <b>sale of sexual services</b> . When children are involved, refer to <b>commercial sexual exploitation of children</b> .
Intravenous drug user	Drugs are injected subcutaneously, intramuscularly, or intravenously. Use <b>person who injects drugs</b> to place emphasis on the person first. A broader term that may apply in some situations is <b>person who uses drugs</b> .
Sharing (needles, syringes)	Avoid 'sharing' in favour of <b>use of non-sterile</b> injecting equipment if referring to risk of HIV exposure or <b>use of contaminated</b> injecting equipment if the equipment is known to contain HIV or if HIV transmission occurred through its use.
Fight against AIDS	Use <b>response to AIDS</b> or AIDS response.
Evidence-based	Use <b>evidence-informed</b> in recognition of other inputs to decision-making.
HIV prevalence rate	Use <b>HIV prevalence</b> . The word 'rate' implies the passage of time and should not be used in reference to prevalence. It can be used when referring to incidence over time e.g. incidence rate of 6 per 100 person-years.

For extensive guidance on HIV terminology, refer to the full UNAIDS' editors' notes for authors, which is on the UNAIDS website.

## Language on 'key populations'

Avoid using jargon such as 'key populations' and language that dehumanises people by turning them into acronyms. It is always better to describe a person in full, rather than use an acronym. For example, say a person with a disability rather than PWD, and men who have sex with men rather than MSM. Below is a list of preferred terminology.

### Drug use:

'People who use drugs' is the preferred term. We use this term, influenced by the term people living with HIV, to assert that people who use drugs are more than just a risk group. They are people first and foremost.

Sometimes we use injecting drug user, a commonly used term to refer to the particular subset of people who use drugs. Injecting is the behaviour that is the focus, and so sometimes injecting drug user is more specifically relevant. We avoid terms like drug addict, drug abuser or junkie as they are stigmatising and have negative values attached to them.

### Sex work:

For adults, use terms such as sex work, sex worker, commercial sex, transactional sex, or the sale of sexual services.

The term sex worker is intended to be non-judgemental and focuses on the working conditions under which sexual services are sold. Sex workers include consenting female, male, and transgender adults and young people over the age of 18 who receive money

or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally. Acceptable alternative terms for 'sex worker' are women/men/people who sell sex. Clients of sex workers may be called men/women/people who buy sex.

### Men who have sex with men:

MSM is a common abbreviation used for men who have sex with men. The term men who have sex with men is used because it is not a prescriptive label and can be used regardless of whether a man also has sex with women and whether he identifies himself as gay, bisexual or heterosexual. However, as discussed, abbreviations should be avoided, so don't use MSM, instead always write the term in full.

### Women who have sex with women:

The term women who have sex with women is useful as it includes not only women who self-identify as lesbian or homosexual and have sex only with other women but also bisexual women as well as women who self-identify as heterosexual but have sex with other women. Again, always write out the term in full.

### Transgender:

A transgender person self identifies their gender as different from his or her sex at birth.

Transgender people may be male to female (female appearance) or female to male (male appearance). It is preferable to describe them as 'he' or 'she' according to their gender identity (the gender that they are presenting, not their sex at birth).



A couple who are members of the men who have sex with men rights organisation PEMA in Mombassa, Kenya



Transgender outreach worker in Ecuador

### Transsexual:

A transsexual person refers to a transgender person who has undertaken surgery and/or hormonal treatment in order to modify his or her body to align more with his or her preferred gender. But not all transgender people want to or can afford to undergo such procedures.

### Transvestite:

A transvestite is a person who usually identifies with their biological sex and gender but who sometimes wears clothes associated with the opposite gender to temporarily assume a different gender identity. A transvestite, also known as a crossdresser, does not necessarily desire a permanent sex change or other surgical reassignment.

### Exercise

Rewrite the following paragraph to avoid stereotypes and stigmatisation:

Betty is a prostitute who works the streets to support her drug addiction. She became an AIDS victim after being paid extra money to have sex without a condom. She had no idea the client was AIDS infected, as he appeared healthy. Her daughter is an innocent victim of this transaction, born HIV+ 8 years ago, she now lives with a foster family and suffers from a variety of AIDS-related illnesses. Betty herself can barely afford treatment, but continues to work the streets when her health permits.