

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gender, culture, religion and HIV/AIDS

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Objectives

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Provide a broad understanding of culture and religion, as well as an appreciation of the inherent difficulties in the definition of both;
- Explore the impact of culture and religion on gendered social relations and on the management of HIV/AIDS.
- To illustrate ways in which cultural and religious practices can be used effectively in the management of HIV/AIDS.
- To explore new ways of disseminating information on HIV/AIDS from a cultural and religious point of view.



Culture can be a powerful force for change: AIDS awareness day at the Polytechnic of Namibia, May 2003.

Introduction

Culture and religion play a key role in defining and shaping gender relations. Culture is one of the fundamental bases from which “female” and “male” identities are formed and entrenched in different societies.

The survival of culture is largely dependent on the role played by various social institutions in the maintenance, encouragement and passing from generation to generation certain behaviour patterns. Over time, these patterns become unquestionable and acceptable norms.

Religion also underpins identity formation. It is a major institution in all societies, and almost every human civilisation has produced a system of religious beliefs. Religions may or may not include a belief in a supreme being, but all are concerned with the transcendent, the spiritual, and with aspects of life beyond the physical world.

Often societies turn to religion as a means of connecting with a supernatural force, which they believe is more powerful than themselves, and which they also believe to be in control of their destiny and fate.

The initial foundations of patriarchy can in many instances be traced back to culture and religion. While not all cultural and religious practices seek to reinforce gender inequality, there are many practices that have been endorsed by citing culture or religion as their basis.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has forced societies to reckon with issues of sexuality and sexual conduct. It also has simultaneously stirred within various cultures and religious institutions vigorous discussions on issues of morality and immorality. Cultural and religious views have again found themselves in the eyes and ears of the public: influencing mindsets, casting blame, as well as battling to gain a position from which solutions to the epidemic can be found.

Communicators who carry within them their own cultural and religious belief systems are tasked with communicating on HIV/AIDS in a manner that does not pass judgment, foster existent stereotypes or stigma and discrimination.

Exercise one

Ask the participants to identify and list cultural and religious beliefs that they have personally internalised as part of their belief system. (This can be done anonymously.)

Put up the cards or list for all to analyse together. Ask the following questions:

- Are there any beliefs among the list that are not oppressive to any group of people?
- Are there any beliefs among the list that determine how we expect women and men to behave?
- Are there any beliefs among the list that have implications on how as communicators we may view people infected with HIV/AIDS?



Tips for trainers: This exercise helps the group to begin from the personal to illustrate how the belief system carried by individuals has an impact on how they view their own role in society and the role of “others”. These beliefs lead to the development of prejudices or biases that can often influence the perspective journalists and communicators take in writing on issues of gender and HIV/AIDS. The facilitator, using examples that emerge on the list from the group should illustrate how the beliefs listed translate into several of the evaluative messages prevalent in the mass media and information campaigns on gender equality and on HIV/AIDS.

Definitions

Culture is the learned behaviour of a given human society, which acts like a template, in that it has a predictable form and content that shapes behaviour and consciousness within that human society, and it is passed on from generation to generation.

The common strands in understanding what culture is and what it does are:

- It is socially constructed;
- It shapes one's identity and consciousness;
- It is passed on from generation to generation through institutions of socialisation, such as the family, the church, schools, the community; and
- It is not static. Culture is dynamic and therefore is capable of being influenced and changed.

Religion is a system of faith and worship, which provides adherents with meaning and purpose in their lives. It is one of the major institutions in society, with almost every human civilization producing a system of religious belief. Religions may or may not include a belief in a supreme being, but all are concerned with the transcendent, the spiritual and with aspects of life beyond the physical. Theology refers to religious study, or an academic discourse on religion.

Box four: Culture and religion

Similarities

- Gives meaning to an individual's existence;
- Prescribes and/or proscribes behaviour;
- Provides a sense of belonging and a sense of community and support;
- Marks life events through the use of rites of passage; and
- Provides a sense of continuity – connects the past and the future.

Differences

- Faith in a supernatural being is not a requirement for culture – adherence is sufficient;
- Culture is not perceived as having been revealed in scripture and it can evolve organically to reveal the changing context of the group and is not constrained by the divine word of a supernatural being;
- Religion views itself as the principle custodian of the soul; and
- Culture focuses primarily on the here and now, while religion is concerned with the hereafter.

The family

The first point of cultural formation is the family, which also represents a microcosm of society. The family reflects the values, customs and norms of the bigger community.

Different family members express themselves within the family largely in ways they would express themselves within the community. The most evident form of this is gender roles within the family, which largely follow societal patterns of power relations between men and women.

Families are also capable of influencing gender role changes within society, making them prime sites for change. One example of this is when a girl is socialized by her parents to excel in non-traditional roles for women – becoming an airline pilot, astronaut, political leader, among others. While society may accept this role change in the public, it still puts pressure on women to revert back to traditional roles when they are within the domain of the private/domestic.

The community

The community mirrors what happens in families. The role of the community at a macro level is to maintain and enforce a shared consciousness within members of that community of who it is, what it does and how it does it.

Culture and exclusion

Exercise two

Ask the group to identify groups within their community or nation who are marginalised and denied their basic human rights. Write the list on the board or flipchart and ask the group the following questions:

- What reasons are given for the marginalisation of the groups listed?
- Who ensures the continued marginalisation of the groups listed?
- Why do you think the marginalisation of the groups listed continues in societies?
- How many of the participants fall into any of the groups listed on the flip chart or board? (Ask the participants to raise their hands without necessarily volunteering into which group they fall. If a member of the group feels free to identify the group they fall into, ask him or her how they reconcile the conflict between culture and universal human rights).



Tips for trainers: The group should identify culture and religion as two of the factors that contribute to marginalization; when they begin to understand who is responsible for continuing that marginalization, they may also begin to see the links between gender, religion and culture. **Handouts twenty-four and twenty-five** provides more information on culture and human rights.

Gender, culture and HIV/AIDS

Culturally – entrenched gender roles and norms about sexuality help to fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS, and women and girls are particularly vulnerable to infection because of the cultural practices and norms which continue to keep women in a position of inequality.

In many societies, cultural norms dictate that women must play a passive role in sexual interactions, and there are strong social pressures for women and girls to remain ignorant about sexual matters. When young girls remain uninformed about how to protect their sexual health, they may engage in high-risk behaviour – such as unprotected anal sex to avoid pregnancy – placing themselves at greater risk to HIV infection.

Boys and men also are disadvantaged by the culturally-accepted expectations that they are knowledgeable about sex – and therefore need no information or guidance – or that they will learn from their peers. Norms of masculine strength and self-reliance also encourage the denial of risk in men.

The power imbalances and inequalities between men and women, which are rooted in and justified by culture, hinder women's and girls' abilities to negotiate safer sexual practices with their partners.

There also are several cultural practices and beliefs that hinder providing information on sex that could empower women, girls and young boys to better protect themselves from HIV infection. Some of these practices and beliefs are:

- Fathers cannot talk to their sons about sex, it is the duty of the uncle.
- Mothers cannot talk about sex to their daughters, it is the duty of the aunt.
- When a girl falls pregnant, she should not let her parents know.
- Anything related to sex and reproductive organs is taboo, so child abuse cannot be reported to the authorities.
- Culture does not allow children to be too close to their parents; parents wield too much power for the children to be able to open up.
- Women should learn in silence.
- Women should not question men on anything.
- Children cannot go directly to their fathers if there is anything they want. They should first go through the mother, who in turn will take the matter up with the father.

handout twenty-four

Culture and human rights

In theory, there should be no conflict between culture and human rights.

The concept of universality establishes a legal and moral standard of minimum protection for maintaining human dignity. Therefore universal human rights should not be understood as the imposition of one cultural standard.

Human rights are based on the principle of respect for cultural diversity and integrity while ensuring that the assertion of cultural rights does not lead to the denial of the rights of anyone or any communities. In other words, no human right can be exercised in a way that undermines the human rights of others.

The right to cultural or religious expression is often used for the denial of the fundamental human rights of women. Those who argue that culture should have precedence over human rights often attack the concept of universality as “Western”.

It is important for the media and communicators to clearly distinguish between the notion of “universal” and “Western”, and to identify discrimination based on culture.

For women, and many other marginalised and vulnerable groups within any society, the challenge of this century continues to be how to maintain the integrity and distinctiveness of one’s culture while at the same time, challenging and changing those aspects of culture that treat women or any vulnerable group as less than human.

Universality is often questioned in the following three contexts:

- By oppressed communities to assert their own identity against the domination of a more powerful group;
- By governments to justify political and/or economic repression against the general population or particular groups of people;
- By governments and other authorities to justify acts of discrimination and violence against women.

(“Local Action, Global Change – Learning About the Human Rights of Women and Girls”).



handout twenty-five

Cultural practices that make women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS

Practice	Definition	Gender Issue	Justification for practice	HIV/AIDS
Lobola	Paying of bride price – groom pays to the family of the bride in livestock and/or a determined sum of cash.	Woman becomes man’s “property”; she is subject to the will of her husband and of his family.	Culture – seen as a necessary token to solidify ancestral bonds between two families.	Bride price negotiated between husband and his family; she is given to him the day after the wedding.
Female genital mutilation (FGM)	Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris. Excision: removal of the clitoris and labia minora (vaginal lips). Infibulation: removal of all external genitals and the stitching together of the lips leaving a small opening; the stitches are removed when the girl is married.	The practice is done to ensure female chastity and ensure that women do not experience sexual pleasure.	The practice is sanctioned by culture and some religions.	The increased risk of vaginal infections, contracted HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections. FGM also causes pain, mutilation, and scarring of the vaginal tissue and the hymen, which can lead to susceptibility to infection.
Death cleansing	Elder of the family, usually the maternal uncle of the deceased, has sex with the widow to cleanse her of her husband’s spirit.	Women have no say or choice in the act.	Culture	A woman whose husband has died, whose spirit is believed to be haunting her, is known as a widow.
Widow inheritance	Following a man’s death, the widow is inherited by a younger brother or close relative of the deceased.	The woman is denied the right to choose what she wants for her life after her husband’s death.	Culture	A woman whose husband has died, whose spirit is believed to be haunting her, is known as a widow.

Exercise four

Break the participants into two groups and give each group a copy of the article, “Morality list at altar of money – Outdated cultural practices are spreading AIDS” in **Handout twenty-six**. Ask the groups to consider the following:

- What reasons are given by the religious leader for the spread of HIV/AIDS?
- How would you sum up the religious leader’s views on the role of culture?
- How does the article link gender, culture and the spread of HIV/AIDS?
- What are the religious messages communicated through the article?

Reconvene and discuss the group’s answers and other points raised from the article.



Tips for trainers: The interview is an interesting combination of back-to-roots but also being critical of certain aspects of culture. It conveys the sense that culture is dynamic. How possible is to keep sifting out the good from the bad? From a media point of view how could this article have been strengthened through other points of view? How could it have been cast as a more analytical piece?

Culture, HIV/AIDS in the media

The media tends to write and produce stories on cultural practices in a sensational and unbalanced way often perpetuating stereotypes, norms and myths. Such unbalanced reporting further entrenches norms and beliefs rather than challenging practices which perpetuate gender inequality and which lay a basis for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The media often appears to regard tradition and culture as untouchable. Rather than raising the public’s consciousness about the inherent dangers of harmful cultural practices, the media has, in some cases, created myths. For example in South Africa, the “myth of sleeping with virgins”, reported on as a cultural practice, as a means of cleansing men of their HIV infection, is said to be one of the contributing factors to the high level of child rape cases in the country. Yet research has not linked this practice to any ethnic group in the country.

The media can play a constructive role by providing a forum for debate and analysis of the cultural practices in a society. Many communities also have started to adapt rituals, like widow inheritance, in light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and it is critical that the media also reflects the dynamic changes in culture that are taking place.

handout twenty-six

Morality lost at the altar of money: Outdated cultural practices are spreading AIDS

The world leader of the YMCA movement has lashed out at the decadence caused by materialism writes Keith Ross

South Africans should rediscover their morals, said theologian and television personality, Mr Caesar Molebatsi in Durban over the weekend.

He said South Africans of all races were in need of moral regeneration and that too many South Africans of all races were obsessed with their economic goals and had lost touch with their souls.

“They equate a better life for all with economic prosperity and this brings a sterility that excludes the soul,” he said.

Molebatsi said an obsession with material values had led to social and moral decay, and caused communities to become decadent.

“Many people now have the money to do things they could not afford before, but morals have lapsed, and this has led to corruption, lawlessness and the spread of HIV/AIDS”.

He said it was also obvious that many black people were slowly losing their culture and traditions. Some young people from affluent black families were even losing their language.

“In my house I have had to rule that nobody speaks English after six in the evening. My children were not speaking their own language at all.”

Molebatsi said black people should therefore look to their past, and save that which was best from their culture and traditions before it was too late.

“I would like to see a spiritual reaching out by our people. I would like to see a revival in this country of the spirit of ubuntu in its most basic form.”

He said the time had come for them to discard the things that were “bad” and unsuited to modern-day circumstances.

Molebatsi, who is also a community leader and company director was recently elected president of the World Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations.

“Economic ambition without good ethical and social constraints impoverishes people and destroys the value of relationships.”

But he also felt that South Africans should stop blindly following traditions without assessing their modern-day relevance. “Some things in African culture are retrogressive. There is a kind of cyclical thinking that does not promote progress. People should stop doing things in a certain way just because their grandfathers did them.”

Molebatsi said the traditional African view of women would also have to change. The traditional view put men in a protective but dominating role.

“Women in the African tradition stayed at home while the men went to war. In this tradition the focus of wisdom was based on the person who was the strongest.

“But wisdom is no longer the preserve of the strongest – of men. There is now a great equalizer; education. Wisdom is now the preserve of the experienced and the educated.”

He said the old tradition of male domination was contributing to the spread of AIDS. “Because of the old conditioning, many women feel they cannot say no. They know they will not be taken seriously.

“This is one of several factors that have caused AIDS to spread more quickly in our country than would normally have been expected.”

(Daily News Durban, South Africa, October 28, 2002.)

Culture as a tool in HIV/AIDS prevention

Culture is dynamic and there are positive ways in which practices and ceremonies can be used to become the channels for communicating information and education on sex and how to prevent the spread of HIV.

Exercise five

Ask participants to read the article in **Handout twenty-seven**. “Tradition takes center stage in HIV/AIDS Prevention” written during the Zambia training workshop on HIV/AIDS and discuss. Find out if participants know of similar uses of culture and traditional practices in their own country to stem the spread of the virus.



Tips for trainers: Encourage participants to think about how established cultural practices and traditions can be used positively to reduce the spread of the epidemic.

Some of the cultural practices and rites that can be used are:

- **Initiation ceremonies for women and men:** Initiation rites of passage have been historically used as “schools” where cultural concepts of femininity and masculinity are passed on from generation to generation. These platforms could be used instead to feed through new messages on gender roles and HIV prevention.
- **Abstinence and virginity:** Virginity testing ceremonies, which most Southern African cultures practice, could focus on virginity as a way to stay safe from contracting the virus, not necessarily as way to check the chastity of girls. Also, boys too should be tested to highlight the responsibility of both sexes in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Abstinence, however difficult it is to encourage, remains one of the safest means to avoid contracting the virus.

Gender, religion and sexuality

Power relations within religions follow patterns of power relations within given societies. Patriarchy is entrenched in religion, affording men power over women, which is justified as “the will of God”.

Religion also remains one of the most powerful tools for shaping and defining moral values in societies. Within all religions, there is a strong focus on sexual morality. Religion also impacts on the shaping of sexual identities of its observers. In Christianity, for example, women are presented with the image of the virtuous virgin (Mary mother of Jesus) and of the vilified prostitute (Mary Magdalene). There are however, no opposing roles for men, apart from their role as the “head of the family” or “head of the woman”.

Heterosexuality is the acceptable sexual orientation of religious doctrines. People whose sexual orientation is other than heterosexual are seen as “sinners” or “defilers” of the divine law. For example, when HIV/AIDS first appeared more than 20 years ago, it was tagged as the “gay disease” and seen as divine punishment for homosexuality.

In addition to the emphasis on the sexual values propagated by most religions of faithfulness to one partner, abstinence before marriage and heterosexual behaviour, religion also has been used to justify women’s subordinate position in society. In all the world’s major religions, religious texts have been interpreted to reinforce the power of men in society.

Throughout the world conservative or fundamentalist movements, often associated with conservative nationalism or right-wing politics, pose a major challenge to gender and sexual equality. Religion is the foundation on which these movements build their doctrines. Their attitude towards gender and rights issues may include a belief that women’s proper place is in the home; opposition to reproductive and sexual rights; blaming women for the “decline in moral values”; vilifying women who step outside traditional roles; and active homophobia.

Religious texts are often interpreted and used as justification for gender discrimination, as well as for discrimination against homosexuals. Because religious texts are considered sacred and hold divine authority for believers, people often accept gender discrimination and homophobia as the way the world’s order should be.

But almost all religious texts have been subject to numerous interpretations, translations and have been influenced by the views of those religious scholars (usually male) who interpret the texts. These scholars’ views are informed by the norms and values of their societies.

handout twenty-seven

Tradition takes centre stage in HIV prevention

By Julius Silupumbwe

On a hot Saturday night in a packed hall with drums beating led by Mtendere's best known drummer, Kenny Tabula, one by one, young women walk onto the stage.

Dressed in traditional regalia, beads, reeds, etc one young woman says: "My name is Patience Tembo and I'm 18 years of age. A Nsenga girl wears the traditional outfit I am wearing when she becomes of age. She is put in a house for a month, and traditional counselor or "Bana Chimbusa" teach her good manners, hygiene and to stay away from boys."

"The traditional teaching I am giving is coming from the Bemba; *Umwana ashumfwa amenene umwefu kwikoshi*, which means "if you can't hear what people are saying to you, something bad may befall you..."

The "Miss Tradition" Pageantry is not your average beauty contest. In fact, the event is not about beauty at all. It is an initiative of youth who belong to the

Society for Women and AIDS in Zambia (SWAAZ) started at their Mtendere Family Support Home to teach their peers about traditional practices that can reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, and those which contribute to the spread of the virus.

The youth identified traditional initiation ceremonies and traditional weddings as cultural practices that should be strengthened and promoted, while practices such as sexual cleansing, circumcision and polygamy were among the practices identified as promoting the spread of HIV/AIDS. Ways to improve the harmful practices included, but were not limited to, the use of non-sexual methods of cleansing, the use of one razor for each child circumcised, and encouraging monogamy in marriage.

Following the National Consultative Meeting on Traditional Rituals and HIV/AIDS organized by SWAAZ in 2001, the youth decided to develop a strategy that would catch the attention of

their peers. They decided on a modeling contest, the first of which was held this year on Jan 25 at the Alliance Francaise.

Fifteen girls were chosen from the 60 who were trained for three months by various organizations in traditional rituals, beliefs, customs, HIV/AIDS, sexually-transmitted diseases, family planning, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, condom use and assertiveness.

Zambia's Integrated Health Programme (ZIHP), the Society for Family Health, the Youth Activist Organization, the Lusaka Museum and individuals like advice columnist Auntie Josephine, among others, trained the young women.

The pageant had three categories. In the first one, the young women had to explain a traditional attire and a traditional teaching. The second category required them to present and explain another attire and the nutritional value of a traditional food. The young women answered



questions on traditional rituals and HIV/AIDS in the third category, and also explained another traditional outfit.

"The Miss Tradition idea has started to move among the youth and should not be left to slacken or stop," said Bernadette Nkaka Sikanyika, the SWAAZ Project Coordinator. "It needs to be supported technically, materially and financially to enable these youth who participated in this to go out there and teach their peers in their communities, schools, churches and other institutions".

(*Our Right/Write*, The Newspaper of the Zambia Media Training Workshop on Gender and HIV/AIDS, 1 February 2003.)

Gender, religion and HIV/AIDS

When the HIV/AIDS pandemic first unfolded, many people sought answers to “why” the virus and the subsequent long and debilitating illnesses leading to death arose, not in medical science only, but in religious doctrine.

While medical science and research could provide the facts about how the syndrome came to be, how it is transmitted and its effects on the body’s immune system, religion provided for many people, the “moral justification” for HIV/AIDS.

As noted earlier, the epidemic was first seen as a punishment for gays who had deviated from the “natural order” of sexuality as “divined” by religious law. Later, as it became increasingly clear to societies that HIV is also transmitted through heterosexual relations, people again sought answers in religion with a focus on issues of sexual morality – abstinence before marriage; monogamy in relationships and marriage; sex once again being placed within the context of marriage and procreation as prescribed in religious texts.

Religious leaders, especially in Christianity, became vociferous in messages that warned people of the breakdown in morality, which had led communities away from the traditional, strong family structures. Religious leaders also began to strongly advocate against sex education for youth.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic gave many religious leaders the excuse to raise patriarchal arguments such as:

- Women should leave the workplace and return to the home to nurture and give moral guidance to their children;
- Sex education should not be offered in the schools or offered to youth by any institution;
- Women’s rights activists had contributed to the breakdown of the moral fabric of societies by advocating for the change in gender roles;
- Advocates of reproductive rights (abortion, contraceptives) have promoted sex outside of the institution of marriage, which leads to immorality and sin; and
- Sex work, promiscuity, homosexuality are all forms of the immorality that have gripped modern society.

These messages also formed the basis of earlier information, education and communication campaigns on HIV/AIDS, which were primarily targeted at women. Also, because these messages were grounded in religious doctrines, the stigma of “an immoral person” was attached to those who were infected with HIV/AIDS. “Loose or immoral women (“prostitutes”), promiscuous men and women, and gay men, were stigmatised as the ones most likely to pay for their sins by being infected with HIV/AIDS.

So strong have been these earlier religious messages on “who is most vulnerable” to HIV/AIDS, that a wall of silence emerged and people continue to hide their status for fear that their “moral” character will be judged.

Both the media, and information and communications experts working in the area of HIV/AIDS have been locked in the “moral conflict of right and wrong”. Many of the “religious messages” on the pandemic as outlined earlier, found their way into media reports, as well as in HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns. In earlier media reporting, for example, stories focused on sex workers and homosexuals. This form of reporting reflected the “religious” message and fuelled an attitude of self-righteousness.

To break away from this form of “blame” reporting or the construction of self-righteous messages grounded in religious doctrine, journalists and communicators should remember the following tips:

Exercise six

Break the participants into groups and ask each group to do the following:

- Identify HIV/AIDS campaigns or media articles member in the groups have come across which had identifiable gender, cultural and/or religious messages for the target audience.
- Choose one or two from the examples cited by members of the group and prepare a summary of the campaign or article to share with the plenary in the report back.

- In addition to the summary, list the gender, cultural or religious messages that were transmitted by the campaign and/or media article.
- In the light of the chapter's discussion on gender, culture, religion and HIV/AIDS, how would the group re-write the messages of the campaign and/or articles identified?



Tips for trainers: This exercise is designed to allow the group to reflect on the kinds of religious and cultural messages that the media transmit on HIV/AIDS. Some useful tips are provided in Box six.

Box five: Avoiding self-righteous messages on HIV/AIDS

- Identify the behaviours that put one at risk, rather than the type of person that may be at higher risk. High risk behaviours include unprotected sexual intercourse, sharing needles for injections, sex with multiple partners.
- Messages should reveal how HIV/AIDS can be transmitted to people who are not necessarily engaging in high-risk behaviour – someone who is raped is at risk of HIV/AIDS; a person who gets a blood transfusion where screening mechanisms for blood banks are not fully in place may also be at risk; married and monogamous women are at risk, because their husbands or partners may secretly engage in unprotected sex with other partners.
- People with or otherwise affected by HIV/AIDS should not be portrayed as irresponsible, which shows bias and judgment.
- When profiling a person living with HIV/AIDS in a story or information campaign, focus less on how the person became infected and more on other aspects of the person's experience.

(Adapted from "Reporting on HIV/AIDS in Africa: A Manual" by Julia Beamish, African Women's Media Centre, Dakar Senegal.)



Story ideas from this chapter

- Stories that expose the cultural practices that continue to place girls and boys at risk of HIV/AIDS.
- Stories on how communities are adapting cultural practices in the light of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.



Key learning points

- How the interface between culture, religion and gender oppression contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Culture and religion have an impact on gendered social relations, and there are many examples of practices that exacerbate power imbalances between the sexes, adding to the disempowerment of women and the increased spread of HIV/AIDS.