

STIGMATIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION OF

SEX WORKERS WILL NEVER END IN UGANDA

We have tried to sensitize our community on how to treat each other with respect and dignity in spite of what we do, our back grounds and nature of life we live but in Uganda is all in vain.

Members of Women's Organization Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA-Uganda) have forwarded in several complaints I our office on how they are treated in our referral centre (Mulago which is government and public Hospital) but it's really embarrassing and horrible.

Members have said, when they reach in the Hospital for STD's/STI's treatment at MARPs in Mulago where our members (sexworkers) are offered free STD's/STI's treatment, they are examined by the doctors on duty but before they are treated they have to go through the procedures of routine HIV/AIDS testing which is not bad, but the challenging part come in when a sexworkers is forwarded to the department which tests HIV/AIDS because MARPS do not handle HIV/AIDS issues.

After the sexworkers has been diagnosed at MARPS she is recommended to go for blood test in HIV/AIDS department before she is trested with a small chit to be given to the doctor who is going to test her blood. The chit reads, *"She is a sexworkers, please take her blood sample for HIV/AIDS test and send her back to our block with her results"*.

Mulogo being a government hospital and offering free services there are very many people in the line waiting to be tested and some few doctors working on different patients in this open space. The doctor reads the note and asks, *Are you a sexworker?* Loudly and every turns to see who is a sexworke, he goes ahead to ask, *"How many men have you had sex with? You are a beautiful woman, why don't find a man for yourself and get married?"*

You can just imagine how you would feel if you happen to be in the shoes of a sexworker and your asked such questions in a crowd of such people.

- How would you feel?
- What would you do if you are the one?
- What should we do as sexworkers
- Should we stop going for treatment and just die in silence?
- Do sexworkers have rights access health service like any other human being?
- Ho are sexworkers treated in your countries?

- If they are going through the same situation like ours how have they managed to cope up in such environment?
- How have Human right activists helped them?

In the New vision of 19th 05 2009 Dr Kihumuro Apuli, Director of Uganda AIDS Commission stated that HIV prevalence among sex workers is 50% and 10% are male clients between the age of (15-49) and we should always remember that if sexworkers are not safe then no one is safe. If sexworkers continue to be discriminated in accessing health services then HIV/AIDS prevalence will continue to increase due to fear and stigma and difficulties in accessing health care prevention.

After all of the above the Government of Uganda is coming up with a bill to criminalize sexwork.

- Do you think our government is being fair or is doing the right thing?
- Do you think sexworkers are criminals or sexwork is a crime?

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