

HIV is the leading cause of death in women between 15 and 24 years old

Nob 16, World Health Organization Reports

“Women experience a low socio-economic status in many countries which can reduce their ability to seek and obtain the information they need to keep themselves safe,” said head of policy at the Alliance, Caroline Halmshaw. The WHO report is very clear that unsafe sex is the main reason why women are becoming HIV positive.

“More needs to be done not only to provide women with condoms but to empower them to be able to negotiate safe sex with their partners and to encourage women to take a proactive role in the design, management and delivery of health services,” she said.

The Alliance promotes the linking of sexual and reproductive health (SRH), rights, HIV in integrated services, in all epidemic settings.

Increasing access to contraception has been shown to be a highly cost effective intervention for HIV prevention in generalised epidemics.

In Southern Africa the Alliance is implementing a regional youth project that aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young women in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. Young peer educators and teachers provide sexuality and life-skills and mobilize the community about SRH.

The results show an increase in community dialogue on SRH and rights, more equal gender relations between girls and boys and a reduction in sexual abuse, early marriage and pregnancy.

In the Caribbean community outreach workers are reaching sex workers with information on SRH and HIV, along with female condoms, in the venues where they hang out. Worried about the protection of their children they are spurred on to have an HIV test, accompanied by the outreach worker. They access the services they need and are encouraged to use condoms consistently, protecting themselves, their clients and their clients’ partners.

Sexual and reproductive ill-health and HIV share root causes, including poverty, gender norms and inequality, cultural norms and rights violations.

Building women’s leadership in health responses is critical to moving the situation forward. Whilst women are more likely to use the health care system than men, they face challenges accessing health services. One significant step would be to remove user fees for women’s maternal health services.

“The WHO report echoes what the Alliance aims to do in its work, which is to strengthen health systems so that they meet the needs of women appropriately. Linking SRHR and HIV programmes play an important role in efforts to achieve universal access to both reproductive health and HIV prevention, treatment, care and support and ultimately improve women’s health,” said Halmshaw.

The report highlights what the Alliance aims to do in its work, which is to strengthen health systems so that they meet the needs of women appropriately.