

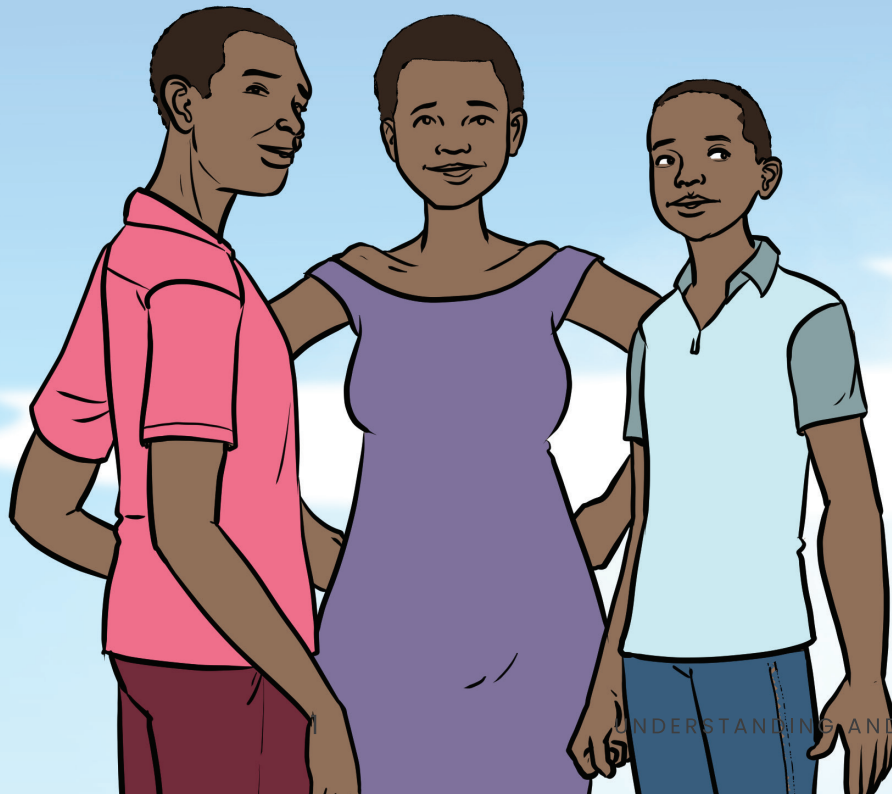


UNDERSTANDING AND CHALLENGING HIV STIGMA - HOW A LEADER CAN HELP



What is stigma and discrimination?

- Stigma is the shame or disgrace attached to something regarded as socially unacceptable. There is usually a feeling of 'us and them'. People who are stigmatized are marked out as being different and are blamed for that difference.
- Discrimination means treating one person differently from another in a way that is unfair – for example, treating one person less favorably simply because he or she has HIV.
- While stigma is sometimes hard to pin down (it may be found in people's attitudes and beliefs), discrimination is a little easier to describe. It's about actual behavior.



What are the major drivers of stigma against PLHIV?

The three key drivers of stigma against PLHIV include:

- Lack of awareness and knowledge of stigma and discrimination
- Fear of acquiring HIV through everyday contact with infected people
- Values that link PLHIV with behavior considered 'improper and immoral', thus justifying discrimination.



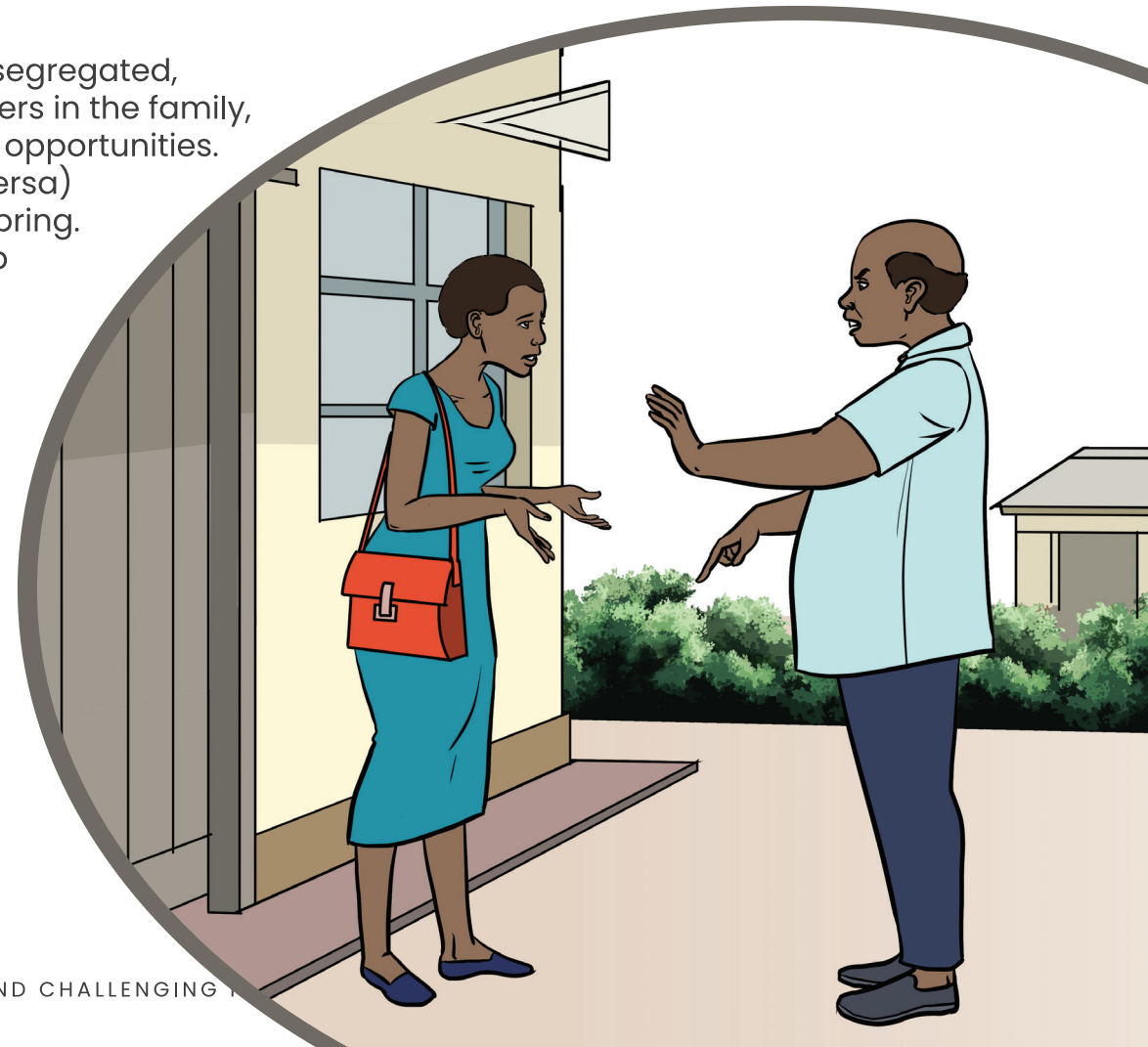
What are the common examples of stigma?

Common examples of HIV stigmatization in our communities include;

- An individual who spends more money, energy and time traveling to a faraway clinic to get his/her monthly supply of antiretrovirals, fearing that her colleagues will find out that she is HIV positive if she went to a nearby clinic
- A doctor who self-tests and self-medicates, and never discusses his HIV status to anyone for fear of losing professional credibility
- A woman who is threatened with violence and disinherited by her family when she discloses her HIV status
- A school that asks orphans to line up separately from other children, not thinking of the impact in the playground
- A tomato seller whose stall is boycotted by a fearful community when rumors are spread about her HIV status
- A religious leader who uses his weekly sermon to teach that HIV is God's punishment to people who sin/misbehave

What is the effect of stigma?

- Stigma has various negative effects at the individual, family, community and national levels that shouldn't be underestimated.
- For an individual, stigma can mean the loss of family and support, being shamed and blamed, and losing self-esteem. It can even result in the loss of someone's livelihood when their job is affected.
- **Families too are affected by stigma;**
 - Children living with HIV and orphans may be segregated, neglected or punished more harshly than others in the family, or they may miss out on education and other opportunities.
 - HIV is passed from husband to wife (or vice versa) because of the fear of what disclosure could bring.
 - Even suggesting condom use in a relationship can bring judgments and assumptions.
- **The impact of stigma can be felt from the community all the way up to the national level;**
 - Clinics and schools become understaffed because health workers and teachers are sick;
 - Stigma or fear of stigma prevents people from going for HIV testing and treatment; and education standards fall, healthcare is less available, and productivity levels drop because of sickness or discrimination.
 - Stigma has had a huge impact on many countries' development.



- **Stigma acts as a major barrier to HIV testing and prevents people living with HIV from accessing antiretroviral treatment programs.**
 - Stigma effectively reduces survival rates as delayed testing leads to delayed diagnosis and delayed access to treatment.
 - Stigma also impedes adherence to medication.
- Antiretroviral treatment needs adherence to be effective, and adherence is the strongest determinant of patient survival.
 - If people are afraid to disclose their HIV status to their family and friends because of stigma, they may resort to hiding their treatment and be more likely to miss doses.

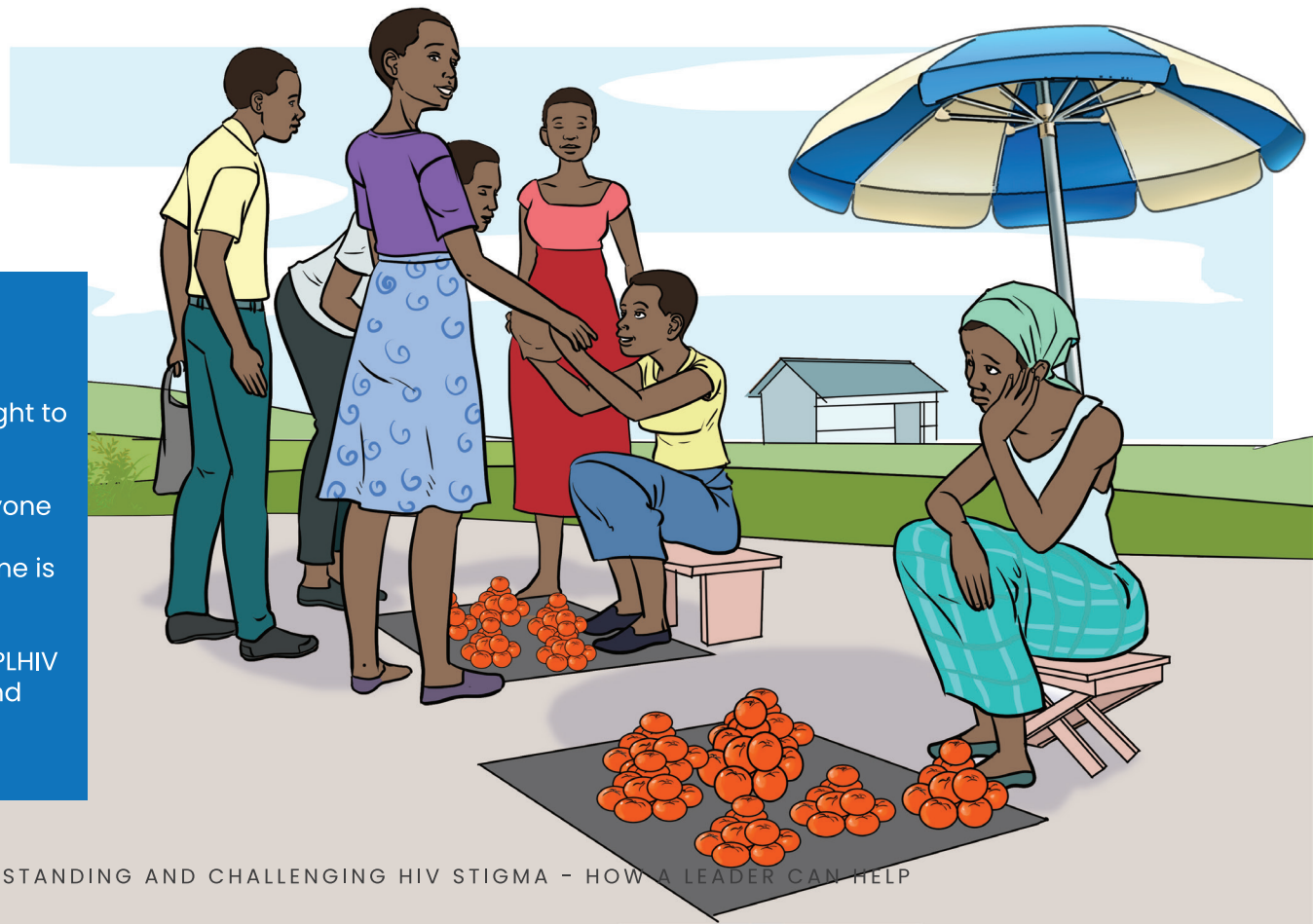


How can we avoid stigma in our communities?

- People living with HIV are encouraged to disclose their status to their loved ones, partners and families and friends. They can support you emotionally and help you adhere to your treatment.
- PLHIV are also encouraged to join support groups.
- Family members, friends, schools, employers, health workers and communities at large are encouraged to stop stigmatizing people living with HIV and instead support them emotionally and to adhere to their treatment.

Remember;

- HIV is not spread through touching and sharing of utensils
- PLHIV have rights just like everyone else; right to education, employment, health care, reproduction, relate with others etc.
- It's not PLHIV's fault that they have HIV. Anyone can get HIV. Today its me, tomorrow its someone else. Having HIV doesn't mean one is immoral or promiscuous
- If supported to adhere and take their medication as the health worker advises, PLHIV including children can live a productive and near normal life span.



Call 0800-211-046 & 0800-100-066,
text 8080 Toll-free or
visit a health centre near you
for more information.