

# Unheard Voices: Advocates at the Frontline of HIV and Gender-Based Violence

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In addition to the blog and this resource note, learnings from global civil society, academia, and practitioners were [shared on Twitter](#), leading to new insights, resources, and notable linkages between gender-based violence and HIV. Keep the conversation on gender-based violence (GBV), HIV and its various intersections going by engaging on social media with #Learn4Impact!

## Notable Resources from #Learn4Impact Twitter Chat

- GBV and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is approximately 2-5x higher among women who inject drugs. This [Frontline AIDS briefing note](#) summarizes how women who inject drugs can demand their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), a topic which is explored further in the [Gutmacher Lancet Commission for SRHR](#)
- Frontline AIDS [Advocacy Brief](#) from a first research study on [linkages between HIV and GBV in the Middle East and North Africa](#) (MENA) region led by, with, and for women living with HIV - available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#).
- Transgender and gender non-conforming people from the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region face high rates of violence; the region accounts for 78.8% of all murders reported in this population worldwide from 2008–18. [This research study](#) published in the Lancet explores the effects of violence on this community.
- [A Frontline AIDS systematic review](#) of interventions to prevent GBV against adolescents and young people living with or affected by HIV

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December 10, 2019

The global community marks the end of this year's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence (GBV) with Human Rights Day. CanWaCH and our global partner **Frontline AIDS** are reflecting on the interaction of **GBV and HIV** through digital storytelling. Women impacted by HIV often face a range of types of gender-based violence (GBV), which is both a cause and consequence of living with HIV. Watch four compelling stories shared by a diverse group of women at the Canada Pavilion alongside Women Deliver 2019.

## Stigma Masking Signs of GBV

*“Is it because I’m Indigenous? Is it because I was a drug user? Is it because I’m HIV positive?” - Flo*

**Flo sought care** in the Canadian healthcare system after being injured from partner violence. Yet, the signs of violence and bodily harm were dismissed. In addition to partner violence, women living with HIV can be denied adequate, timely and quality care in health settings because they are marginalized by race, age, sexual orientation or drug use history, among other factors.

Unfortunately, Flo’s case is not unique. Valerie adds that **stigmatizing behavior** by healthcare workers can lead to them overlooking signs of sexual violence. The results are two-fold: distrust in health services and under-reporting of violence.

## Gendered Double Standard in Drug Use

*“Women who are using drugs and/or living with drug addiction should be more visible in leadership positions to empower equitable policies and improved services” - Halyna*

As an advocate for Ukrainian women who are living with drug addiction, **Halyna offers a deeper look** into blanket assumptions about motherhood that can lead to discrimination against people who use drugs which in turn leads to different forms of GBV. For instance, women who have a history of using drugs can be considered unfit to raise children and are subject to punitive laws of forced child removal.

Women who use drugs are **two to five times more likely to** experience GBV than women in the general population. This includes violence from partners, from clients if women are also engaging in sex work, from judicial systems, and while accessing health and social services.

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## Empowering Youth

*“On a daily basis, children, adolescents and young people [with HIV] go through stigma and discrimination at every level” – Maximina*

Maximina’s tireless advocacy for deeper social connection for youth through peer support has been influenced by her own experience of being challenged with navigating HIV and **SRHR health services in Zimbabwe**.

In Southern and Eastern Africa, **four out of five 10-19 year-olds newly acquiring HIV are girls**. HIV-related stigma coupled with gender discrimination, creates huge barriers for young people living with HIV to claim and realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

## Moving Forward

These stories cannot remain in conference corridors, but should push us globally to critically engage in how HIV living experience translates to policies and services. As we move into the next decade of the global HIV response, these often unheard voices point to some priority actions:

1. Implement comprehensive sexual education for adolescents and young adults. This point was driven home as part of the ten-year, **\$1.4 billion Canadian annual investment** in the health and rights of women, adolescents and children which includes a focus on critical gaps in SRHR.
2. Invest in a strong, independent and accountable civil society that can support funding and capacity strengthening of **local women’s groups**.
3. Take positive action by working alongside persons and communities affected by HIV across government, civil society, social services and health systems, and **avoid a top-down approach**.
4. Choose kinder words and actions: “If you see a woman or a child struggling with HIV, wrap them in a blanket, that blanket could be words, an actual blanket, or a hug, **but words can heal**.” -Valerie

## Personal Testimonials

**Flo Ranville:** Peer Mentor/Qualitative Interviewer with the **SHAWNA project**, was born and raised in Vancouver. Flo has worked on a broad range of studies involving women living with HIV, such as on healthcare access, child separation, experiences of incarceration, and studies specific to Indigenous women living with HIV. She has over 15 years of experience in the anti-violence field. She was diagnosed with HIV

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in 2000. Flo has survived personal experience living in the Downtown Eastside, substance misuse, violence, homelessness and sex work.

**Valerie Nicholson:** Honouring her given names The One the Eagles watch over, NoDe WenDa {wolf eyes} and Auntie from the Torres Straight Islander, Valerie is Mi'kmaq, Haida and gypsy. Living with HIV for 15 years, Valerie currently works at the **British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS** as a Peer Researcher and co-investigator, and the 2018 recipient of **CAHR Red Ribbon Research award**. Valerie is the board Chair of **Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network** and Indigenous Peer Navigator with **Positive Living Society of BC**.

**Maximina Jokonya** has over eight years of experience in the world of HIV/AIDS is currently working for **Africaid** in Mutare District, Zimbabwe as a Zvandiri Mentor, driving peer to peer support. Maximina draws her experience from being born with HIV. She supports the Community Adolescent Treatment Supporters in delivering differentiated care for children, adolescents and young people living with HIV. Africaid Zimbabwe is part of the **READY movement** run by Y+ - the global network of young people living with HIV – with support from Frontline AIDS.

**Halyna Kornienko** is the Advocacy Manager at Hope and Trust, an organisation providing legal support to mothers on Opiate Substitution Therapy who risk losing their children. They also conduct research - led by and for women who use drugs - looking at women's access to SRHR services. Hope and Trust is one of the founders and supporters of the Ukrainian Network of Women Who Use Drugs (UNWUD/ VONA), and a partner in **PITCH**.

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## Resources

**Frontline AIDS Gender Leaflet:** putting gender at the heart of the HIV response

**PITCH: Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect the HIV Response** – supports local organisations that work with marginalised communities and adolescent girls and young women to advocate, generate evidence and improve policy in the HIV response

**READY:** portfolio of programs designed to build resilient and empowered **adolescents and young people**

CanWaCH Project Explorer projects: **SGBV; HIV; Adolescent Health**

**Full Panel Video: Stigma, Choice, Change - Women in their Diversity Speak Out.** June 2019.

**Africaid Zvandiri publications**

**Women, ART and the Criminalization of HIV (WATCH) Research Project**

**SHAWNA Project (Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS: Women's Longitudinal Needs Assessment) and Infographic**

UNAIDS, 2019. **Women and HIV: A Spotlight on Adolescent Girls and Young Women**

Roberts A., Mathers B.M., Degenhardt L. Women who inject drugs: A review of their risks, experiences and needs (Independent Reference Group to the United Nations on HIV and Injecting Drug Use, 2010). **Available here.**

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# READY

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