Healing Trauma and Ending Violence Against Women Are Crucial for Improving HIV Health Outcomes: Moving From Recommendations to Action

Addressing and healing the effects of recent and lifetime trauma may be the missing ingredient in improving lives and health outcomes for women living with HIV.

Women living with HIV experience violence and trauma at a higher rate than U.S. women in general -- and women living with HIV are pushing back with information and advocacy. Numerous studies have shown:

- Over half of women living with HIV (WLHIV) have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), compared to the national rate of IPV among women (36%); 58% of transgender women reported violence at home
- 30% of WLHIV experience post-traumatic stress disorder, more than 5 times the national rate
- Women with a history of IPV are more likely to report HIV risk factors
- WLHIV who reported recent trauma were 4 times more likely than those who didn't to face challenges with their HIV treatment
- WLHIV may face violence, or the threat of violence, as a result of their HIV status
- Violence and HIV together can result in health outcomes worse than either condition by itself

Advocates believe that systematic methods to screen for and address trauma may be necessary for successful ongoing HIV care

To improve the quality of women's lives, the Interagency Federal Working Group on the Intersection of HIV/AIDS, Violence Against Women and Girls, and Gender-Related Health Disparities was formed by President Barack Obama in March 2012. The working group unites eight federal agencies whose work touches the lives of women living with and affected by HIV. This group has developed a set of powerful guidelines for breaking the cycle of trauma and HIV among women -- our next step is to move these recommendations to action.
Core Recommendations of the Federal Interagency Working Group on the Intersection of HIV/AIDS, Violence Against Women and Girls, and Gender-Related Health Disparities:

**Improve health and wellness for women by screening for IPV and HIV**
- Incorporate IPV and HIV screenings into reproductive health, prenatal and primary care settings
- Link HIV testing and linkage to care to domestic violence and rape crisis networks, and promote training, linkages and collaborations
- The Affordable Care Act provides opportunities to make these screenings more widely available under fully covered women's preventive services

**Improve outcomes for women in HIV care by addressing violence and trauma**
- Care and services for women living with HIV must fully integrate awareness of past and current trauma to promote healing (this is known as *trauma-informed care*)
- Increase screening for IPV and linkage to services where women with HIV receive care
- Roll out and evaluate programs, and increase provider knowledge, around trauma-informed HIV services

**Address contributing factors that increase violence risk for women and girls living with HIV, including housing instability and HIV criminalization laws**
- Address the potential violent consequences of disclosure -- including IPV -- in states with HIV criminalization laws; assure such instances of violence will be classified as hate crimes
- Train providers in homeless shelters and housing programs to address the intersection of HIV and violence against women, both in and out of HOPWA settings
- Increase housing provider awareness that discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, including toward transgender women, is prohibited in their programs under the Equal Access Rule

**Expand public education, outreach and prevention around HIV and violence against women and girls**
- Enhance violence prevention programs, especially for youth and communities of color
- Engage men and boys in preventing IPV

**Support research to understand the scope of the intersection of HIV/AIDS and violence against women and girls, and develop effective interventions**
- Areas in need of more research include: economic empowerment strategies; the role of men and boys; and deeper understanding of the parallel epidemics of HIV and violence against women and girls
- CDC will review existing literature and data addressing this intersection and identifying interventions

**What can you do in your communities to help make these recommendations a reality for women and girls?**
Talk to your peers, local HIV clinic, AIDS service organizations (ASOs), other providers, policymakers and local media about the importance of taking action on these recommendations, to improve the lives and uphold the rights of women living with HIV across the U.S! Learn more at [pwn-usa.org](http://pwn-usa.org), share your opinions on our Facebook page at [tinyurl.com/pwnusafacebook](http://tinyurl.com/pwnusafacebook), and follow us on Twitter (@uspwn) to find out more about what women living with HIV are doing to secure justice and healing for our communities.

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Positive Women’s Network - United States of America (PWN-USA) is a national membership body of women living with HIV working to prepare and involve all women living with HIV, in all our diversity, including gender identity and sexual expression, in all levels of policy and decision-making to improve the quality of women’s lives. PWN-USA applies a gender equity and human rights lens to the HIV epidemic to achieve federal policies grounded in the reality of women’s lived experiences.