

Strengthen Linkages between Child Protection and HIV Services

In sub-Saharan Africa, children orphaned by HIV and those living with HIV-positive care-givers face an increased risk of physical and emotional abuse. They experience greater stigma and bullying than their peers and have higher rates of transactional sex, increased unsafe sexual activity and/or experience sexual abuse.¹ Childhood sexual abuse is linked to higher rates of sexual exploitation and other HIV risks (e.g. earlier initiation into injecting drug use, sex work and living on the streets). There is a direct link between childhood sexual, emotional and physical abuse and HIV infection in later life for both women and men in high prevalence areas.

Children orphaned by HIV are twice as likely as non-orphans to be infected. Their caregivers have higher rates of depression than other caregivers in sub-Saharan Africa, leading to increased mental health and behavioral problems in the children.

KEY ACTIONS REQUIRED

- **Ensure that HIV and child protection are explicitly linked in one national policy. For example, using the development of the national policy frameworks for children (e.g. the National Children's Plan, Vulnerable Children's Strategy or National AIDS Strategy) to highlight the connections between HIV, economic, and child protection vulnerabilities.**
- **Guidelines and standards on HIV and child protection must include a focus on understanding and addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination as experienced by children and adolescents.**
- **Children, adolescents and young people — especially those living with HIV — must be included in all aspects of HIV programming to help reduce stigma and discrimination and improve child protection, mental health and psychosocial well-being outcomes.**
- **Invest in a strong case-management system that links HIV, health care, economic strengthening/social protection and child protection. This will improve paediatric testing and treatment outcomes and support HIV-affected children and families/carers that are at risk of harm.**

1. Long and Bunkers. "Prevent and protect: Linking the HIV and child protection response to keep children safe, healthy & resilient." UNICEF and World Vision. 2015