3 General impacts of HIV and AIDS on universities

Universities function as a microcosm of the larger society within which the institutions exist. As such, your institution will therefore feel the impact of HIV/AIDS on many different levels. There is little doubt that the epidemic will make its mark on the “bottom-line” of your university balance sheet, but more importantly the impact extends into productivity and the future prospects of your institution. The following chapter provides you with some insight into the extent to which the epidemic can affect your university.

Remember that the impact of HIV will depend on the severity of the epidemic in your country or region, and within your university. Much of the chapter below assumes a generalised or hyperendemic HIV epidemic situation, since this is the most common in the region. However, if your university is in a low prevalence country, you may well not be aware of all of the impacts that are described here.

3.1 Financial impacts

- **Increased costs:** It is likely that your university may experience increases in direct costs (i.e. costs that involve increased financial outlay), indirect costs (those that reflect reduced workforce productivity which whether by the infected worker or by others whom HIV/AIDS concerns deflect to the other activities) and systemic costs (those arising from the way that the disease reduces the overall skills and experience in the workforce, affects on moral etc.).
- **Reduced productivity:** Absenteeism can make a huge impact on the functioning of universities, and accounts for the largest share of the costs arising from HIV and AIDS in the workplace. While significant costs are also incurred for funerals, deaths of trainee members of staff represent a threefold loss: the loss of well qualified and carefully selected individuals; the loss of training investments; and possibly the costs of repatriating the remains of the deceased.
- **Threatens sources of income:** Many students may not be able to fulfill their aspirations of attaining a higher education, not because they do not meet required standards but due to financial constraints. HIV/AIDS constrain the public and private resources available for university education and make a significant impact on household economies. This means that families and individuals tend to have fewer cash resources at their disposal, whether for education or for other purposes. As a result, universities will be constrained in their efforts to generate income through student fees.

3.2 Social Impact

- **Investment in education:** When families feel financially constrained they may be less inclined to invest in education and training programmes where the returns lie in the distant future. The expectation of a lower lifespan as a result of HIV/AIDS may contribute to this mentality.
- **Avoidance of certain professions:** Families and individuals who know of individuals having contracted the disease in high risk employment may become less inclined to invest in training towards high risk professions. Teachers, health workers and other critical professions may experience drops in enrolment as they have historically been associated with high levels of HIV infection.
- **HIV/AIDS and university teaching and research functions:** Due to higher levels of sickness and death a number of teaching programmes may need to utilize more junior and less experienced staff. The loss of experienced staff and the increased reliance on more junior staff may find universities operating under less than ideal circumstances.
- **Reduced learner participation in academic activities:** Many students have difficulties coping with their positive status. A large number of students study away from home and do not have the support of a family in dealing with some of their emotional difficulties. These difficulties may have a profound effect on the students’ ability to learn and concentrate.
- **HIV/AIDS and university social life:** In many countries the culture of university campuses appears to be ambivalent about sugar daddy practices, sexual experimentation, prostitution on campus, unprotected casual sex, gender violence, multiple partnerships and similar high risk activities. Residents at universities should be considered as high risk environments for the transmission of HIV, and student communities with elevated rates of risky sexual behaviour may be important sources of new HIV infections.

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