‘If and how’ groups can contribute towards HIV & AIDS Stigma Reduction in Zimbabwe?
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Background: Stigma has been identified as a primary barrier to effective HIV prevention and the provision of care and support to People with HIV & AIDS. Much has been written about the need to involve communities in efforts to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma. However, in Zimbabwe little is known about the role of church groups in reducing HIV/AIDS stigma.

Methodology: A mixed method was employed, a quantitative approach involved a cross sectional study of 10,000 people in 12 sites. A qualitative study of 24 community conversations (3 sets of community conversations with 8 church groups) involving 198 participants and 54 in-depth interviews were conducted. A total of 10,252 people participated in the study. Data were collected throughout 2008.

Findings: In the qualitative study there was a clear need for social spaces and dialogue in these communities in order to reduce HIV & AIDS stigma. Community conversations provided the space in which church members began to tackle AIDS stigma. The quantitative study also noted that social group membership is highly associated with high sexual behaviour and the pathway of stigma reduction is currently being explored.

Conclusion: From the findings it may be necessary to provide social space to communities which in turn provides them with a sense of ownership to tackle AIDS stigma. Community conversations encourage critical dialogue and responsibility for change and draws on local capacities and resources allowing communities to identify the social capital evident within their localities to address HIV & AIDS stigma.