HIV-positive mothers in Viet Nam: using their status to build support groups and access essential services

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Abstract: Various support and self-help groups for people living with HIV and their families have developed in Viet Nam in recent years. This paper reports on a case study of Sunflowers, the first support group for HIV positive mothers in Hanoi, begun in 2004, and a sister group begun in 2005 in Thai Nguyen province. From April 2004 to early 2007, we carried out semi-structured interviews with 275 health care workers and 153 HIV-positive women and members of their families, as well as participant observation of group meetings and activities. Sunflowers have successfully organised themselves to access vital social, medical and economic support and services for themselves, their children and partners. They gained self-confidence, and learned to communicate with their peers and voice their needs to service providers. Based on personal development plans, they have accessed other state services, such as loans, job counselling and legal advice. They have also gained access to school and treatment for their children, who had previously been excluded. Although the women were vulnerable to HIV as wives and mothers, motherhood also provided them with social status and an identity they used to help build organisations and develop strategies to access the essential services that they and their families need. © 2008 Reproductive Health Matters.

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