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FOREWORD

The dearth of empirical data to support lobbying and advocacy strategies for law and policy reform was one of the reasons that led to the formation of the Gender Centre. Consequently, research was identified as one of the programming activities of the Centre in order to achieve its overall goal of promoting and protecting the human rights of Ghanaian women.

In our work addressing violence against women, it became clear that violence was linked to women's low status in society in many areas. The increasing high prevalence of HIV/Aids among women influenced us to undertake the study to establish if violence and or other social factors had any links to women's vulnerability to the disease. The study findings have clearly established the link between violence and gender norms to women's infection rate, reinforcing the findings of similar studies in other parts of Africa. The study has demonstrated that in a context where women do not have the same power as men with regard to sexuality, the ABC strategy cannot be as effective in preventing HIV transmission.

The findings give us the opportunity to adopt new prevention strategies, in addition to the ABC strategy. The voices of the women interviewed in the study reveal the multiple factors that influence transmission of HIV in the Ghana context and it is clear that we cannot as a nation reduce the prevalence rate drastically without addressing those social norms that were identified in the study. The legal and policy framework is favourable to addressing some of the factors. The Domestic Violence Act, (Act 732) provides the legal framework for addressing gender based violence. The National Strategic Framework (NSF II) also sets the policy framework for mitigating the economic, socio-cultural and legal impacts of the disease. With the study findings, we believe now is the time to adopt multiple strategies to address all the factors influencing women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. We do hope that the Ghana Aids Commission will ensure that all future projects that it supports will include activities addressing the gender norms and other socio-cultural factors.

Furthermore, it is also our hope that many more organisations would use the findings of this research to develop programmes to address some of the key challenges, so that together we would be able to reduce the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women and girls.

Dorcas Coker-Appiah
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