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Marginalized Communities and AIDS: Beyond Moral Issues to Healthcare for All

Transcript of Interview with Prof. Kate Shannon at the University of British Columbia

How does HIV/AIDS affect marginalized communities?

We know from the kind of landscape of HIV epidemic over the last 20 years that marginalized communities, particularly youths, sex workers, migrant women, and Indigenous and other racialized communities are disproportionately impacted by the epidemic, and we know that women living with HIV continue to be disproportionately impacted both in the global South and North. My work with my team really seeks to look at how structural factors, so things like laws, policies, migration as well as social environment, so housing, gendered violence, shape the HIV response in sexual health and HIV inequities for those communities.

What is your research doing to help?

We saw that through the removal of criminalized laws – so the decriminalization of sex work – we could have the largest impact on the course of epidemics and this was across Canada, but also Kenya and India. So really across diverse settings, we were able to intervene in the Bedford case, which was the Supreme Court case at the Supreme Court of Canada that ultimately struck down the laws around prostitution, and being able to bring that evidence forward, along with a range of evidence that was brought forward by community was really important in ensuring that research is part of that policy discussion. And I think there are many opportunities that we can do to ensure that works going forward.

How can we move beyond moral issues to health for all?

There are many barriers to talking openly about sexual health and HIV, I think it spans from education, the kind of high school level through to just kind of broader policy discussions. And I think for many, you know the second they hear the context of something like sex work, the framing of that for many people brings on ethical questions, and we really need to move beyond that to a kind of framing of, you know, human rights for all and recognizing that this is about access to health and social justice for all communities. And I think that that does get really caught up often within the context of moral debates, when it really needs to be moved past that to something more around human rights and health.