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People Living With HIV/AIDS

- **PLWHA:**

PLWHA stands for Persons Living With HIV/AIDS. ARCHIVE's client is FEBS, a group in St. Marc that provides psychosocial services for PLWHA locally. PLWA stands for Persons Living With AIDS.

- **FEBS Clientele:** According to FEBS:

Currently, FEBS is serving 498 adult PLWHA in the St. Marc area, 430 of which are under ARV treatment and 60 who are not under treatment but are receiving psychosocial services and nutritional support. There are 4 new clients who are soon to be placed under ARVT. Typically, new clients come to FEBS with a TB infection and with medicinal support are able to clear the infection. At the present time 3 clients are strictly under anti-TB medication, and one is under both anti-TB and ARV treatments. About a dozen of FEBS clients identify themselves as sex workers, all of which are female. And 14 men identify themselves as MSM (men who have sex with men).



According to Housing Works:

In the last year, FEBS served 525 men, women and children living with HIV AIDS. Of these, 247 are children from age 1 to 17. The majority of these children are HIV- orphans of parents who died of HIV and 16 children are HIV+. Of the remainder of FEBS clients, all of whom are HIV+, 65% are women and 35% are men. About 20 of the men are openly gay or identify as transsexual. Of FEBS HIV+ clients, more than 80% are living with AIDS as defined by a CD4 count below 250.

Of FEBS adult female clients, while 5% have been infected by their long term partner, poverty dictates the high rate of infection. The overwhelming majority have been infected through opportunistic sex exchange for food, shelter and other necessities. A much smaller percentage considers themselves to be sex workers.

- **PLWHA Lifestyle:**

Male clients primarily identify as heterosexual, There is widespread stigma against same-sex sexual activity. About 20% openly identify same sex behaviors as their risk factor. There are also about a dozen or so female clients who claim to be sex workers.

According to FEBS Psychologist, Claudmir Constant:

There are a handful of homosexuals who have come forward, however Claudmir believes that there are likely a few who are hiding their sexuality. For the most part, clients became infected with HIV through unprotected sex, though there may be a few cases where people shared a needle to contract the infection.

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In general, after one's HIV+ status becomes known, lifestyles change significantly. For instance, youth who previously frequented bars or clubs will stop going because of financial constraints (for transport and drinks). They also actively avoid discrimination.

Most clients are from a lower class bracket and few have higher levels of education. Very few can read or write in Creole. There are some who can speak French. These clients are primarily homosexual and work as advocates throughout the community.



- PLWHA Ability to Support Themselves:** According to FEBS: About 10 of all of FEBS adult clients have a regular job. A small percentage of FEBS clients have professional backgrounds, but some of these have lost their jobs when their HIV status became known. Others are inflicted by the same high rate of unemployment as plagues the rest of the nation. The overwhelming majority of FEBS clients are unskilled laborers or farmers. They earn livings through casual labor, including construction, cleaning, carpentry, and odd jobs in the market. Some 50% of the men work as subsistence farmers. This is not radically different from the rest of the region where over 80% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day.



According to ARCHIVE Research:

Most of FEBS clients are unemployed without any source of income. Many of them will take up odd-jobs that provide an unreliable source of income at best. Few have steady jobs. Oftentimes, those who were previously employed were not able to retain their jobs after becoming HIV+ due to either stigma or physical restrictions from illness. Those that do have regular jobs are typically farmers or skilled workers (plumbers, etc).

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Many clients are physically able to work but do not have the skills necessary to secure a steady job. For example, some would like to be merchants at the market. But this requires initial investment and know-how to start the business. Many do not have access to capital and are therefore not able to pursue this ambition.

According to FEBS Psychologist, Claudmir Constat:

About 70% of FEBS' clients do not have steady jobs to support themselves. After the January 12 earthquake, many jobs were destroyed due to the loss of industry and supplies, The situation has caused the low employment figure to worsen and the job market now is even less secure. Most PLWHA, unable to establish a commercial vending business at the market, resort to ambulant selling. While this is not formal work, ambulant sellers wander through the streets with baskets on their heads full of goods to sell to passers-by and cars. Goods usually include condensed milk, candy, and other smaller items.

FEBS' primary goal is to empower their clients so that they can support themselves. They see AIDS not as the end of life, but as a new way of living. They encourage all their clients to find work, even though this proves to be a difficult task. FEBS does employ some clients as promoters a couple days a week to help educate and sensitize the St. Marc community about HIV/AIDS. The goal is prevention.

- **PLWHA Concerns:** According to ARCHIVE Research:

PLWHA are most preoccupied with the ability to support themselves. Securing shelter for themselves and their families remains foremost on their minds. This is followed by finding a means of employment to provide food and pay for their children's schooling. There are examples of clients who have started to build their own homes without enough money to complete them. This precarious situation leaves these PLWHA in an especially vulnerable situation. They are not able to readily abandon their half-built homes but nor are they able to live in them.

Another overwhelming concern is the stigma that is usually experienced within the family units and amongst friends. It is believed that no amount of counseling can prepare a PLWHA for the social difficulties they will encounter after contracting HIV. PLWHA are also not protected by any legal rights, therefore they are often subjected to violation against their rights, such as property rights, human rights, legal rights, etc. Oftentimes they are forced out of their homes against their will due to stigma against their status. They are taken advantage of due to their inability to defend themselves.

- **PLWHA Daily Activities:**

For those without employment, daily activities (aside from receiving treatment for illness) include keeping house or helping out around a shared house. This includes making sure children are transported to school, food has been prepared, and cleaning is completed.

Many will go to the market in search of odd jobs to provide a small source of revenue. There are not many opportunities for economic development. In general, PLWHA are not able to do much due to a lack of money. There are some clients who simply develop a sense of worthlessness from lack of work.

According to FEBS Psychologist, Claudmir Constat:

Apart from seeking treatment, daily activities for most clients also include gardening.

- **PLWHA Interests:**

In general, PLWHA share the same interests as those with the rest of the St. Marc community. Such interests as cooking, eating and taking care of families are of prime importance. For leisurely activities, this may include: listening to the radio, participating in cock fights, making jokes, playing soccer, and attending church or praying.

- **PLWHA Needs:** According to ARCHIVE Research:

The needs for PLWHA in St. Marc are threefold as it relates to housing: the prevention of disease transmission, housing provision after a crisis, and preparation for autonomy in the greater economy. Providing housing that prevents disease transmission will help the community to evolve into a healthier community than currently exists. Building housing after a crisis also offers interim shelter for displaced individuals and families.

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Though housing in and of itself remains the greatest unmet need of PLWHA in St. Marc, many are not able to sustain themselves financially. Providing job skill training through construction ideally will help to develop workers in a difficult economy.

- **PLWHA Individual Descriptions:**

One woman, Pierre Luc Altaysace, a 43 year-old living with AIDS, has been struggling to support three children on her own. Both her family and friends cut off communication with Pierre when her status became known. She now rents a 2-room home without a kitchen or bathroom and is late on her next annual payment. She is not sure she will be able to pay it. Pierre is not currently employed but aspires to be a market merchant. Unfortunately she does not have enough money to start up this business endeavor.

Another client, Fenelus Edner, is 22, and lives with his partner in a town about 20 minutes from St. Marc. Their house is 1 room with no toilet or kitchen. His family severed ties with him after he announced his homosexuality. Fenelus is currently unemployed but wishes to work as a vendor in the market. He does not have the capital to pursue this venture.

Estime Eugene is one of the elder clients with FEBS at 62 years of age. He lives with is family of 5, his wife, and three grown children in a two room house. They have no shower or toilets. And their kitchen is outside. He has steady employment as a local farmer.

Loreus Evlnie is a 33 year-old living in her mother's 3-room home with 7 other people. She does not have a husband but is the primary care giver for her sister's three children. She's unemployed so she helps out around her family's house during the day.

Estime Rose Andre is a 31 year old living with her two children and her brother in a one-room house. Sometimes her husband lives there as well; they have an unstable relationship. She has expressed that housing is her biggest problem and they struggle to pay the rent every two months since she cannot find formal work. Her current house is a 10 minute hike up the side of a mountain which prevents her from leaving the house to seek treatment when she falls ill.

Estime has been HIV positive since 2007. She finds odd jobs as a source of income to feed her children and for their schooling. She would like to find a steady job but currently is not able to. She is often the victim of harassment from neighbors who constantly remind her of her HIV+ status. She has never had tuberculosis but her husband, who is also HIV+, has recovered from it.

PLWHA are arguably the most vulnerable individuals in St. Marc. In the wake of a disaster such as the earthquake or flooding, there's nowhere to turn as many have been abandoned by family and friends. This was the case after the 2008 hurricane. One FEBS client from Port-au-Prince came to St. Marc after the January earthquake hit but is still struggling to secure housing for her and her family.



*FEBS client that lost her home after the 2004 hurricane

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- **PLWHA Family Units:**

The majority of PLWHA in St. Marc are single parents struggling to support children. There are also several clients in nuclear families. Usually when one parent is infected with HIV, the other will be too. The chances of one partner being infected and the other not are extremely rare.

Most families become somewhat unstable after HIV positive status is known due to suspicions raised about the other partner's fidelity. It is common for one parent to leave and live elsewhere after they are diagnosed. Usually children will remain with the mother. However if the mother is unable to provide housing, they might remain with an aunt/uncle, or grandparents.

According to FEBS:

The overwhelming majority of FEBS clients, 38.9%, are in non-committed relationships, meaning they live with their significant other but are not married. Another 18.7% (272 clients) are married, while 17.3% are single or children. 8.7% are widows/widowers.

- **PLWHA Children:**

There are about 30 PLWHA children under FEBS care at the moment. The majority have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS, although there are still a few with surviving parents. Typically, these children face the same stigma as their parents. With current medical support, many are able to manage their health and avoid the onset of AIDS.



- **PLWHA Orphans:** According to FEBS:

The vast majority of both the HIV- and + orphans are "restavek". That is, they live as servants with a family to which they are not related. HIV- orphans face the same stigma as is faced by persons living with HIV and can look forward to a life of servitude. For this group of children, both sexual abuse and sex work are key risk factors. Many of the HIV+ children live with one or both parents who are also HIV+.

About half of FEBS' orphans currently have full-blown AIDS.

- **PLWHA Extended Family Members:** According to FEBS:

It is usually the family causing PLWHA the most distress and discrimination. Extended family members usually find it difficult to accept that their family member has an illness. As a result PLWHA are subjected to improper treatment. Usually the less educated a family is, the worse the stigma will be towards the inflicted family member.

Many of FEBS' clients live with extended family members and are subject to abuse and mistreatment as a result. There are also many, especially homosexuals, who have been outright rejected by extended family.

- **PLWHA Community Groups:**

Outside of FEBS, there are no community groups specifically for PLWHA. FEBS does organize community meetings occasionally but this is carried out with a FEBS promoter. Often times, clients will meet on their own accord. However there are no fixed clubs or groups.