

Abstract

Since access to HIV testing, counselling, and drug therapy has improved so dramatically, scholars have investigated ways this 'scale-up' has interacted with HIV/AIDS-related stigma in sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on data collected during ethnographic research in a trading centre in western Kenya, this paper critically analyses two violent and localised case studies of panic over the ill health of particular community residents as a nuanced lens through which to explore the dynamic interplay of gender politics and processes of HIV/AIDS-related stigma in the aftershocks of the AIDS crisis. Gaining theoretical momentum from literatures focusing on stigma, gender, witchcraft, gossip, and accusation, we argue that the cases highlight collective anxieties, as well as local critiques of shifting gender roles and the strain of globalisation and legacies of uneven development on myriad forms of relationships. We further contend that these heightened moments of panic and accusation were deployments of power that ultimately sharpened local gender politics and conflicts on the ground in ways that complicated the social solidarity necessary to tackle social and health inequalities. The paper highlights one community's challenge to eradicate the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS during a period of increased access to HIV services.