



THE IMPACT OF HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Responding to HIV with blame or abuse towards people living with HIV (PLWHA), simply forces the epidemic underground, creating the ideal conditions for HIV to spread.

IMPACT OF HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION FOR PREVENTION

Stigma and discrimination are enemies of public health. HIV-related stigmatisation and discrimination threaten the effectiveness of HIV prevention and care programs. They create a climate that negatively impacts on effective prevention by discouraging individuals from coming forward for testing, and from seeking information on how to protect themselves and others, thus deepening the adverse impact of living with HIV and AIDS.

People at risk of HIV infection or already infected may choose not to access health care, prevention and education services for fear of being stigmatised by health care and service providers. HIV-related discrimination affects many of the choices that PLWHA, or people at risk, make about being tested and seeking assistance for their physical, psychological and social needs.

PERSONAL IMPACT OF HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Aside from the fact that discrimination is wrong and unjust, it has a destructive impact in particular on disadvantaged, already stigmatised or marginalized communities.

A stigmatising and discriminating environment has devastating consequences in terms of preventing the spread of HIV amongst specific population groups. This is aptly demonstrated by the case of gay men and men who have sex with men:

If I live in a world that is homophobic and heterosexist, which does its very best to isolate me from my peers and keep me from any knowledge or acknowledgment that my gayness is valid, or even exists outside of my head and heart, then of course I am going to feel worthless and have low self esteem... One of the strongest examples of homophobia impacting on the lives of gay men, including HIV prevention, is the lack of basic information about gay issues, gay identity, gay sex, and gay community in schools, including a lack of information about HIV and safer sex issues relevant to gay youth.

For some men, being gay and HIV positive means living in a “double closet” if they decide to keep both their homosexuality and HIV status secret:

I have always hidden my homosexuality from my family and friends. To now come out and say I am gay and I have AIDS, it's a double stigma. Unfortunately, the stigma is attached to you at the time you need support, you are afraid of dying, and you are hurting pretty badly.

People living with HIV and AIDS who hide their HIV status can be affected by depression, stress and social isolation. The need for secrecy about HIV status can also affect whether or not people are receiving life saving treatment, and adhering successfully to that treatment.

IMPACT OF HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

HIV-related stigma and discrimination poses a serious threat to the exercise of basic rights.

Discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS, or those assumed to be infected, violates fundamental human rights, in particular the right to be free from discrimination.

HIV-related stigma and discrimination can adversely affect the exercise of virtually every human right, not only the right to be free from discrimination. The right to privacy, the right to health, freedom of movement, the right to education, housing, freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to life, liberty and security, and freedom from arbitrary arrest can all be denied or violated due to HIV related stigma and discrimination.

ARE YOU HIV PREJUDICED?

For more information visit the campaign website at www.areyouhivprejudiced.org

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