

Services, Stigma and Discrimination: Perceptions of African Descendant Men Living with HIV/AIDS in Brazil and in the US

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Abstract : People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) have benefited from advances in treatment. Medical costs are a challenge for some, but the real challenge is the stigma and discrimination PLWHA continue to face, even though the disease has festered for the last four decades. Few studies regarding stigma and discrimination give voice to those affected by these practices. This study provides a voice to PLWHA in Brazil and in the US as to how they perceive stigma and discrimination, as well as services they access. The methodology of this study was designed based on phenomenological research, which is a research that aims to identify what individuals facing the same situation have to share about their experiences. Qualitative research using in-depth interviews was used in order to gather participants' perceptions about services they access, and stigma and discrimination they experience as PLWHA (hypothesis). The target population was a minority group of 13 Afro-descendant men, mean age of 48.3, residents in East Texas, United States and Salvador, Brazil. Our findings indicate that in both countries, overall, participants have reasonable access to medication and qualified services, except for some specialties, such as dentistry. With regard to stigma and discrimination the majority of participants have not disclosed their diagnosis. They state they prefer not to disclose for fear of being ostracized and rejected. Participants who did reveal their status indicate that stigma and discrimination is a daily occurrence. These experiences tend to occur within their own families, neighborhoods, and in public health agencies where HIV/AIDS is not the focus. Participants who did offer suggestions for social change indicated they would have to reveal their status even if it means being stigmatized and discriminated against. Other factors contributing to this discrimination include skin color and poverty. This study concludes that even after decades since the spread of this epidemic, nothing has changed regarding stigma and discrimination towards PLWHA. Lack of awareness, empathy and education continue to be a major challenge, not only at a local level but across the globe. In conclusion, as documented in previous studies while stigma and discrimination towards this population prevail, negative attitudes will continue to jeopardize all individuals from receiving equal access to prevention, treatment and care. It is crucial to face stigma and discrimination not only as individual experiences, but as social practices that violate and restrict human rights and that as a result, reinforce inequality and social exclusion. Policies should be at the forefront to eliminate the stigma and discrimination PLWHA experience. Health professionals and societies must take a stand in order to promote mindfulness about the negative effect of oppression towards individuals living with HIV/AIDS and the potential global impact of these practices.

Keywords : discrimination, HIV/AIDS, human rights, stigma

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