

EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS (PLHA) ON STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: The incidence of HIV/AIDS is increasing globally. It is one of the public health challenges. The number of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHAs) lives longer as a result of recent advances and access to antiretroviral therapy (ART). On the other hand, the PLHWAs were reported to face stigma and discrimination. **AIM:** This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of PLHAs in Sarawak in relation to stigma and discrimination. **METHOD:** This study employed a qualitative descriptive study with purposive sampling approach. Volunteers were selected from two health facilities in Sarawak. Participants were interviewed using an open ended set of questions as a guideline to collect in-depth information related to stigma and discrimination. Data was transcribed and analysed manually. Saturation reached at the sixth participant. **FINDINGS:** This study found that stigma began with the disclosure of the disease and discrimination occurred at various levels: family, community, workplace and health care settings. These had affected their relationships with people and income. The PLHAs had used some strategies to cope with their livings: seeking social support, denial and nondisclosure, turning to God and religious system and taking prescribed ART. **CONCLUSION:** This study highlighted the complexities of HIV-related stigma and discrimination as a phenomenon. It could assist significant people and policy makers to address these challenges and lessen the sufferings of PLHAs.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, stigma, discrimination, social support, nondisclosure