



Gender and ethnicity differences in HIV-related stigma experienced by people living with HIV in Ontario, Canada

- Loutfy MR, Logie CH, Zhang Y, Blitz SL, Margolese SL, Tharao WE, Rourke SB, Rueda S & Raboud JM
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The question

Do people living with HIV in Ontario experience more HIV-related stigma or less HIV-related stigma based on their gender and/or their ethnicity?

The answer

Gender and ethnicity do affect HIV-related stigma: women living with HIV experienced more HIV-related stigma than men living with HIV and people of non-White ethnicity (Black, Aboriginal, Asian, and Latin-American people) experience more HIV-related stigma than White people living with HIV. Gender and ethnicity also work together to increase stigma experienced among people living with HIV. For example, Black women and Asian and Latin-American men living in Ontario reported the most HIV-related stigma.

Why is this question important?

People living with HIV who experience stigma have poorer mental, psychological, and emotional health outcomes. Stigma may prevent someone living with HIV from accessing health services or disclosing their status—compromising their care and social support. Reducing HIV-related stigma is an important step to improving the health and well-being of people living with HIV.

Discrimination based on gender and race can increase the negative effects of HIV-related stigma. Understanding how these three types of stigma and discrimination interact is important because Ontario has a growing number of ethnically diverse men and women living with HIV. We need to understand the relationship among HIV stigma, gender and ethnicity to develop more effective programs and services.

How was the study conducted?

The OHTN Cohort Study administers two different questionnaires—the Core and the Extended. The Extended Questionnaire includes a tool that measures HIV-related stigma. This study used data from 1,026 participants enrolled in the OCS at four different clinic sites who answered the HIV-related Stigma Scale questions from October 2007 to September 2009. Their responses were analyzed to identify whether there were any differences in how people experience stigma based on their gender and/or their ethnicity.



What else did we learn?

The people most likely to score high on the HIV-related Stigma Scale tool were women, especially women of colour. People who scored lower were more likely to be older, diagnosed for some time, lesbian / gay / bisexual / queer (LGBQ) have more education and consume more alcohol. It appears that the impact of stigma may reduce with time, age, education and being part of a supportive social group.

The history of activism surrounding HIV in the LGBQ community, especially among gay men may have reduced HIV-related stigma among some of these sexual minority groups. Other populations have not had the same history of activism or success in challenging racist and sexist stereotypes. Given the number of African, Caribbean, Black, Asian and Aboriginal people living with HIV—and the number who are women—the study results are particularly important in identifying the challenges of sexism and racism as social ills that are negatively impacting their health.

What's next?

Different approaches are needed to respond to HIV-related stigma based on gender and ethnicity. These approaches should challenge racist and sexist stereotypes. Learning and understanding how racism and sexism may exacerbate HIV-related stigma can also help us develop interventions to challenge stigma.

Want to know more?

This study was published by PlosOne. The full text version is available at:
<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0048168>.

The **Ontario HIV Treatment Network Cohort Study (OCS)** is an ongoing research study that collects clinical, social and behavioural information about people living with HIV (PHA) in Ontario. Participation in the study is voluntary, and all personally identifying information of study participants is removed to ensure confidentiality. The OCS was established to improve our understanding of HIV and to inform HIV prevention, care and treatment strategies for people living with HIV and groups at increased risk of HIV infection. For more information about the OCS, please contact the OCS Research Coordinator, Brooke Ellis at: bellis@ohln.on.ca.