

STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION WILL BE THE END OF US

BACKGROUND

Culture & tradition has always been a major influence on how things are done in South Africa. In my engagements with people who use drugs, I have discovered that it is one of the reasons why women who use drugs choose not to access services available to them and realizing that there is a harsher more severe treatment that women who use drugs are subjected to.

METHOD

The engagements I have had with people who use drugs in Pretoria in the period of Jan-Dec 2024, I have learned that some of the key population have experienced signs and symptoms of Hep C or HIV and some of the women who use drugs have had signs of pregnancy but they will not access essential health care services at some of our local health care facilities due to the stigma and discrimination they are subjected to. Culturally even to this day, in most of our black communities, a woman's place is said to be in the home, being a dutiful wife and mother hence women who use drugs are perceived as dirty and not fit to be mothers. In the recent years we have been engaging with local health care facilities, sensitizing health care providers and working to eradicate stigma & discrimination.

RESULT

Most women who use drugs who fall pregnant end up giving birth without ever attending anti-natal classes thus putting their unborn babies at risk and though some people who use drugs experience signs and symptoms of Hep C and HIV, they do not want to subject themselves to stigma and discrimination by a society should be supporting them.

CONCLUSION

To reach common ground with our key population and health care providers we need to have engagements to educate both sides because we may have programs that are available for people who use drugs but society and the health department needs to play their role and offer support when needed.