

REDUCING STIGMA TOWARDS GROUPS AFFECTED BY BLOOD-BORNE VIRUSES: AN ONLINE INTERVENTION STUDY

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Background:

Stigma has a range of negative effects on population groups affected by blood-borne viruses. The reduction of stigma is a major goal within Australian national health strategies, however, there is a lack of evidence regarding effective interventions to achieve this goal. Drawing on Allport's intergroup contact theory, this study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of an online stigma reduction intervention implemented with the Australian public.

Methods:

Adult members of the Australian public were recruited via Facebook advertising and randomly allocated to one of six study groups: 1) people who inject drugs (PWID, n=316); 2) people living with hepatitis C (PLHCV, n=347); 3) people living with hepatitis B (PLHBV, n=333); 4) people living with HIV (PLHIV, n=320); 5) sex workers (n=296); 6) control group (n=316). Participants viewed a short video depicting personal experiences of their assigned group and completed a series of attitudinal measures before and immediately after the video, and again at three-month follow-up (the control group did not watch any video). Longitudinal changes in attitudes were analysed using a mixed effects regression model with maximum likelihood estimation.

Results:

Immediately after watching the video, negative attitudes were reduced on almost all outcome measures. After three months, positive changes were maintained in attitudes towards PLHBV ($p<.01$) and PWID ($p=.02$); blame directed towards PLHIV ($p=.02$), PLHBV ($p<.001$), and PLHCV ($p<.001$); desire to maintain distance from PLHIV ($p=.02$) and PLHBV ($p<.01$); and opinions about policies regarding PLHBV ($p<.01$), PLHCV ($p<.001$), and PWID ($p<.01$).

Conclusion:

Brief videos depicting groups affected by blood-borne viruses demonstrated positive results in reducing stigmatising attitudes among the Australian public. Online contact interventions have the potential to be scaled up nationally and internationally. These interventions could effectively contribute to reducing stigma and discrimination towards affected population groups.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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