

# Patterns of indirect and direct HIV-related microaggressions and their relationship with self-reported quality of life among people living with HIV

## Authors:

Norman T<sup>1</sup>, Power J<sup>1</sup>, Bourne A<sup>1,2</sup>, Murphy D<sup>1,3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, <sup>2</sup> The Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales, <sup>3</sup> School of Population Health, University of New South Wales, <sup>4</sup> School of Translational Medicine, Monash University.

**Background:** Microaggressions are subtle forms of discrimination that occur in daily life. This study examines experiences of indirect and direct HIV-related microaggressions and their relationship with quality of life (QoL) among people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Australia.

**Methods:** Data were drawn from *HIV FUTURES 11* (2024–26,  $n=706$ ), a national survey of PLHIV. Participants reported how often they experienced HIV-related microaggressions in the past 3 months, including *indirect* microaggressions (negative treatment towards *all* people living with HIV; 6 items) and *direct* microaggressions (negative treatment towards the *individual* living with HIV; 5 items). Response options ranged ‘never’ to ‘often’. Mean scores were compared by QoL, categorised as poor ( $<3.0$ ) and good ( $\geq 3.0$ ) using the PozQoL scale.

**Results:** *Indirect* microaggressions were common. Over half the participants reported hearing “*I’m HIV negative, I’m clean*” (65.0% ever; 25.9% often), encountering exclusionary language on a dating profile such as “*drug/disease free, UB2*” or “*neg for neg only,*” etc. (59.6% ever), or seeing “*an HIV positive person portrayed negatively in the media*” (54.7% ever). *Direct* microaggressions were less frequent but still notable. Two-fifths reported that “*someone assumed [they] don’t or shouldn’t have sex because of [their] HIV status*” (41.2% ever), or “*someone’s body language showed [them] that they were bothered because of [their] HIV status*” (40.8% ever). Perceived comparative stigma was high, with 65.7% reporting they ever “*felt that other health conditions received more public support than HIV*” (31.5% often). Microaggression scores were higher among participants who reported poor QoL (indirect:  $\eta^2=.083$ ; direct:  $\eta^2=.192$ ; both  $p<.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Microaggressions are a common feature of everyday life for PLHIV in Australia and are strongly associated with poorer QoL. While indirect forms are more pervasive, direct microaggressions show a stronger negative relationship with QoL, highlighting the ongoing impact of interpersonal stigma alongside broader social and structural expressions.

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