

# IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS OF THE HIV STIGMA INDEX IN TIMOR-LESTE

## Authors:

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## Background:

Timor-Leste is a small, post-conflict nation in South-East Asia with a low prevalence rate of HIV. In 2017, the national network of people living with HIV, Estrela+, led the implementation of the first in-depth research in Timor-Leste on the experiences of people living with HIV. This was through implementation of the HIV stigma index, as developed by the Global Network of Positive People.

## Methods:

A steering group committee of key stakeholders was formed to support research implementation. The standardised global questionnaire was translated into Tetum and trialled before implementation. The questionnaire included questions on socio-demographic information, and experiences of stigma and discrimination associated with HIV status.

Enumerators recruited to implement the survey were people living with HIV and received expert training in interviewing techniques prior to data collection. Written informed consent was obtained by all participants. Ethics approval was granted by the National Institute of Health.

Data analysis was a participatory process, guided by and conducted by people living with HIV.

## Results:

81 people living with HIV were interviewed. Most respondents (64%) were aged between 25 and 39 years old, more than half (57%) had known about their HIV status for 1-4 years, and 54% were married and living with their partner. 65% of respondents had completed secondary school and 37% were in full-time work.

Significant challenges reported by respondents included being tested without informed consent, that they had difficulty accessing regular medication and health services, had experienced verbal and physical abuse, reported low self-esteem related to their HIV-status, had experienced unwanted disclosure of their HIV status, and reported instances of coerced sterilization.

## Conclusion:

Using the HIV stigma index as a research tool demonstrated that people living with HIV in Timor-Leste face significant challenges around social inclusion and access to quality, comprehensive information and services.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

No disclosures of interest to report.