

“How Did You Get It?”

Gender dimensions of HIV-stigma

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PositiveWomen

Support and advocacy for women living with HIV

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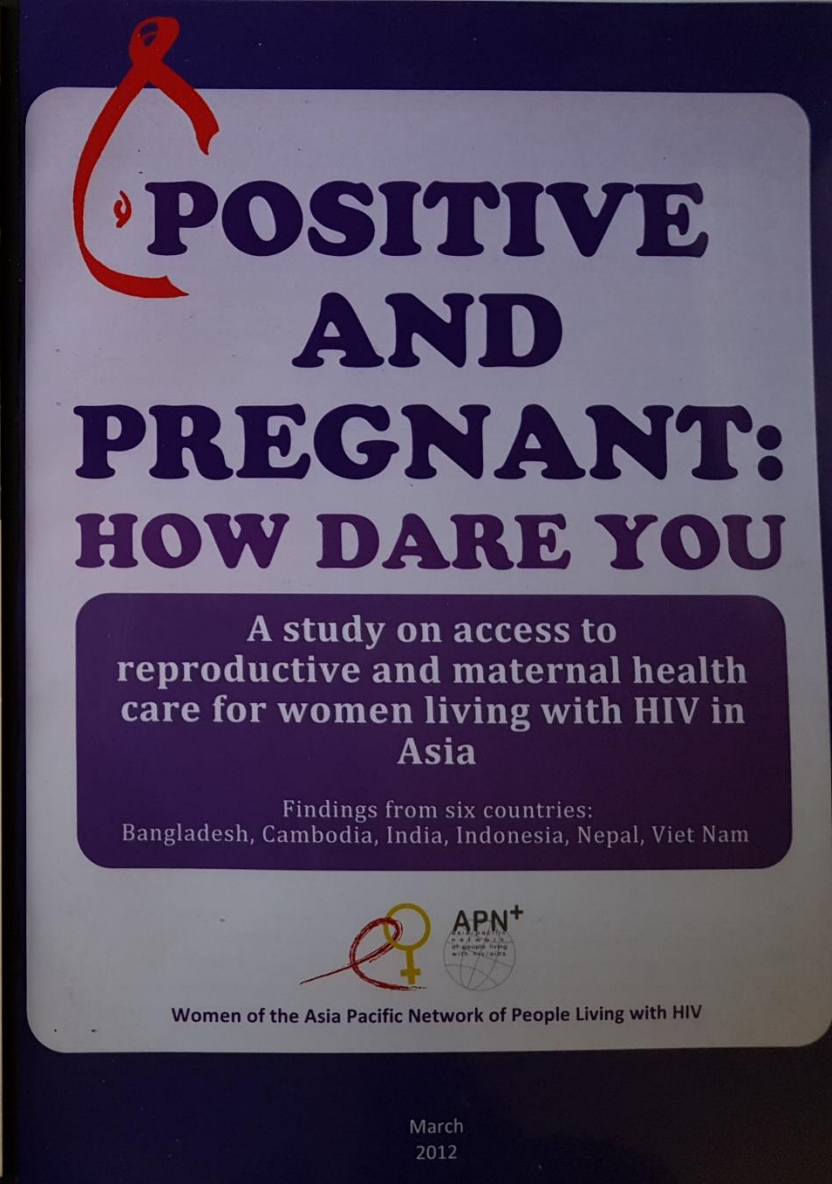
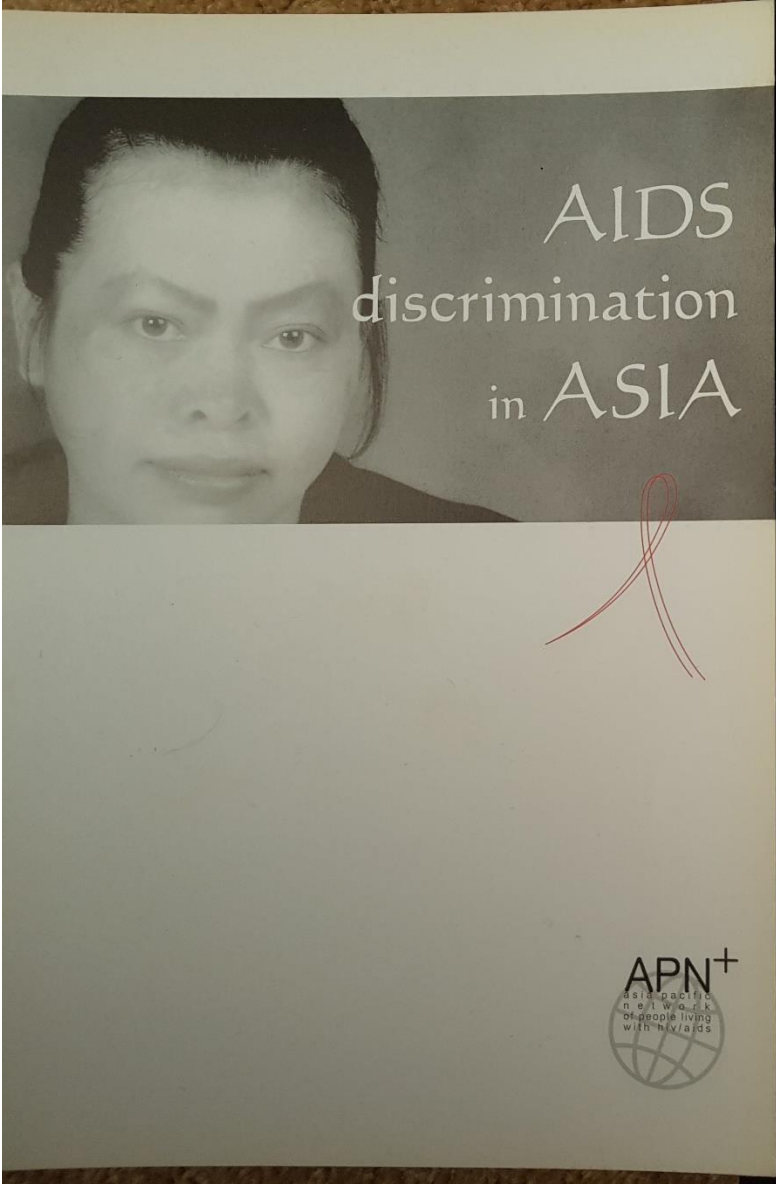
In 2004, I completed the first study of HIV-related stigma: *AIDS Discrimination in Asia*¹, for the Asia Pacific Network of People living with HIV, APN+. (Later adapted by GNP+ as the *Stigma Index*.)

Most people experience discrimination **within health care settings**. This presumably is because that is where more people disclose their HIV status, and health-care workers are simply a reflection of society. However, **women consistently face more discrimination** than men do.

Research I conducted in 2012, *Positive and Pregnant: How Dare You!*² for APN+, highlighted rights violations among HIV-positive women, including coerced abortions and sterilisations. This is despite the fact that women on antiretroviral treatment and who subsequently have an **undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV**.

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16036226/>

² <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/resource/positive-and-pregnant-how-dare-you>



Personally, I have faced discrimination in the health sector over more than 30 years, including deferral and refusal of treatment. Before an angiogram, when I was partly tranquilised, the doctor asked me, ‘A druggie, are we?’! In that instance, I was terrified that I might be treated with less care, depending on my response. The question was insidious, deeply intrusive and judgemental. Before another day procedure years later, the anaesthetist asked, ‘How did you get HIV?’ I gave, by now my stock response ... ‘The same way your mum and dad got you’.

Asking how one got HIV is intimidating and implies judgment
- either an innocent victim or an evil transmitter?

How one contracts HIV has no relevance to how one should be treated

- The vast majority of women in the world contract HIV from their sexual partner
- Australia is no different, and the HIV rate among women who inject drugs is <1%

Why are women asked this inappropriate question so frequently?

I believe it exemplifies the misogyny women experience in society

Women are judged as either virgin, mother, or whore

Stop asking how women got HIV

Every person deserves to be treated with equal respect



HI

I'm a painter
I'm a proud mother
I have a PhD in public health
I fight for the rights of women
I'm HIV positive and
living a positive life.



For my story,
information
and support
qpp.org.au/hi



Queensland Positive People