

UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT CAUSES OF HIV-RELATED STIGMA AMONG THE AUSTRALIAN GENERAL PUBLIC

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Background:

Stigma towards HIV continues to be a significant issue throughout Australian society with little progress being made towards stigma reduction targets. To inform HIV stigma reduction efforts, we investigated associations between potential root causes of stigma and negative behaviour towards people living with HIV (PLHIV).

Methods:

An online survey of the Australian public was conducted in July 2024. Participants were asked a series of questions reflecting potential root causes of stigma, using the framework of stigma dimensions developed by Jones et al. (1984) – concealability, persistence, disruptiveness, aesthetic qualities, origin, peril. Additional questions measured participants' knowledge of HIV, likelihood of behaving negatively towards PLHIV, and perceptions of other people's behaviour towards PLHIV. Factors independently associated with behaving negatively towards PLHIV were assessed using ordinal logistic regression.

Results:

Among 400 participants, 47.0% were men, mean age was 43 years, 20.5% were born overseas, 86.8% were heterosexual. Two-fifths (39.5%) indicated they would behave negatively towards PLHIV. Increased likelihood of behaving negatively towards PLHIV was independently associated with believing PLHIV should always disclose their HIV status (concealability: aOR=1.54, 95%CI=1.04-2.30), blaming PLHIV for acquiring HIV (origin: aOR=1.42, 95%CI=1.05-1.93), having less compassion for PLHIV (origin: aOR=0.58, 95%CI=0.39-0.86), being male (aOR=2.56, 95%CI=1.62-4.03), and believing other people would behave negatively towards PLHIV (aOR=2.86, 95%CI=2.34-3.50). Disruptiveness, persistence, aesthetic qualities, peril, and knowledge were not independently associated with expressed stigma towards PLHIV.

Conclusion:

Interventions to reduce HIV-related stigma would benefit from specifically targeting perceptions of the origin of a person's HIV, particularly in relation to blaming them for acquiring HIV or developing compassion for the manner through which it was acquired. Challenging attitudes regarding the need to always disclose one's HIV status and perceptions of other people's attitudes towards HIV are also key mechanisms that may encourage more supportive attitudes and behaviour towards PLHIV.

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