

Evaluating Experiences of HIV-related Stigma Among People Living with HIV Diagnosed in Different Treatment Eras in British Columbia, Canada

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Background

- Experiences of stigma among people living with HIV (PLWH) are pervasive and are associated with poorer health outcomes
- Stigma is defined by UNAIDS and Goffman (1963)^{1,2} as:
 - “a dynamic process of devaluation that significantly discredits an individual in the eyes of others”
- There is limited data on whether experiences of HIV stigma vary by age and living experience with HIV
- We sought to examine whether PLWH diagnosed in different treatment eras experience varying levels of self-reported HIV-related stigma

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2. Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Simon and Shuster.



Methods

- Between January 1, 2016 to August 30, 2018, we used purposive sampling to enrol a representative sample of PLWH ≥ 19 living in BC into the [STOP HIV/AIDS Program Evaluation \(SHAPE\) study](#)³
- Participants completed the [10-item Berger HIV Stigma Scale](#)^{4,5}
 - 4 subscales measuring: personalized stigma, disclosure concerns, negative self-image, concerns with public attitudes toward people with HIV
 - Higher scores indicate higher perceived HIV stigma
- Multivariable linear regression was used to model the association between year of diagnosis by treatment era and mean HIV stigma score
 - Treatment era defined as: pre-HAART (before 1996), early HAART (1996-1999), modern HAART (2000-2009), Treatment as Prevention (TasP) (2010-present)

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Results

- Of 644 participants:
 - Median age at diagnosis: 34 (Q1-Q3: 27-40)
 - Median age at interview: 50 (Q1-Q3: 42-56)
 - Mean stigma score: 19.05 (range 0-40)
- HIV treatment era was not associated with higher HIV stigma scores
 - Controlling for age, gender, HIV risk group, ethnicity, ever having a mental health disorder diagnosis

Variable	Overall (n, %)	HIV stigma score (median, Q1-Q3)	Multivariable Linear Regression (Estimate, 95% CI)
Treatment era (by year diagnosed)			
Pre-HAART	160 (24.8)	17 (11-23)	Ref
Early HAART	81 (12.6)	20 (13-25)	0.35 (-1.92, 2.62)
Modern HAART	255 (39.6)	20 (14-26)	1.42 (-0.33, 3.17)
TasP	148 (23.0)	19 (12-25.5)	0.83 (-1.25, 2.91)
Age at interview			
Less than 40	127 (19.7)	19 (12-26)	Ref
40 to 49	183 (28.4)	22 (16-27)	2.44 (0.47, 4.40)
50 to 59	229 (35.6)	18 (14-24)	0.23 (-1.77, 2.24)
60 or greater	105 (16.3)	17 (11-22)	-1.76 (-4.14, 0.61)
Gender			
Male	493 (76.6)	19 (13-24)	Ref
Female	139 (21.6)	20 (14-26)	-0.47 (-2.50, 1.57)
Other	12 (1.9)	16 (11-22)	-1.90 (-6.66, 2.87)
Risk group			
gbMSM only	281 (43.6)	18 (12-24)	Ref
IDU only	179 (27.8)	21 (14-26)	0.89 (-1.02, 2.80)
Both gbMSM and IDU	94 (14.6)	18 (13-23)	0.34 (-1.59, 2.26)
Heterosexual only	77 (12.0)	20 (16-27)	2.60 (0.22, 4.98)
Other	13 (2.0)	15 (12-24)	-0.81 (-5.59, 3.97)
Ethnicity			
Caucasian	447 (69.4)	19 (13-24)	Ref
Indigenous	101 (15.7)	21 (14-26)	0.11 (-1.81, 2.03)
Asian/African/Black/Caribbean/Latin	44 (6.8)	17.5 (13-25.5)	-0.95 (-3.57, 1.67)
Other	52 (8.1)	19.5 (13.5-25.5)	0.76 (-1.63, 3.15)
Mental health diagnosis ever	433 (67.2)	20 (14-26)	2.36 (0.97, 3.75)

Table 1: Multivariable model used to model the association between treatment era and HIV-related stigma score (per one unit increase)



Discussion

- We did not find that HIV stigma scores varied by era of treatment engagement, suggesting that despite therapeutic advances, HIV-related stigma remains a problem even for PLWH diagnosed in recent years

Limitations

- HIV stigma scores only characterize experiences of HIV stigma at the time of the baseline interview
- Those facing highest levels of HIV stigma may be less likely to disclose or be inclined to participate in an HIV study

Future research

- Longitudinal analyses that characterize stigma experiences over time may help determine whether individual stigma experiences change the longer they live with HIV

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