

HIV stigma by association among Australian gay and bisexual men and its relationship with community attachment, HIV testing frequency, distress, and rejection

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Background:

Stigma has significant negative effects on the mental health, wellbeing, and healthcare access of people living with HIV (PLHIV). These effects may extend beyond those who are HIV-positive, to people who are perceived to be at risk of HIV. This presentation examines HIV stigma by association among Australian gay and bisexual men (GBM).

Methods:

An online survey was completed by 1,280 Australian GBM. GBM who had experienced HIV stigma by association were compared with those who had not in multivariable analysis. Serial mediation models were tested to investigate relationships between measures of GBM community attachment, sexual identity stigma, HIV testing frequency, HIV stigma by association, psychological distress, and rejection of sex partners.

Results:

A small proportion of participants were HIV-positive (4.1%). More than two-thirds of non-HIV-positive GBM (71.9%) reported experiencing stigma from others for their perceived risk of acquiring HIV (HIV stigma by association). HIV stigma by association was associated with having three or more HIV tests in the past year (aOR=1.94, $p<.05$), greater GBM community attachment (aOR=1.09, $p<.01$), experiencing stigma related to sexual identity (aOR=3.08, $p<.01$), and psychological distress (aOR=1.04, $p<.001$). In the mediation models, GBM community attachment was associated with increased HIV testing frequency, which was associated with lower distress. Community attachment was also associated with stigma by association, which was associated with increased distress and rejection of sexual partners on the basis of HIV status.

Conclusion:

The negative effects of HIV stigma can be broader than those experienced by PLHIV and extend to the wider GBM community due to perceptions that they are at risk of HIV. Higher frequency HIV testing may increase HIV stigma for some GBM. There is a need to address HIV stigma within GBM communities and among the general public in order to support HIV testing and prevention among GBM.

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