

HIV Stigma & Discrimination among Children - Strategies to Overcome: A Review Article

Sureshgouda S Patil¹, Dr. Bharathi M²

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, Karnataka College of Nursing, Hegde Nagar, Bangalore

² Principal and Research Guide, Karnataka College of Nursing, Hegde Nagar, Bangalore

Corresponding Author: Sureshgouda S Patil

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ABSTRACT

HIV/aids related stigma is identified as a major barrier for HIV prevention efforts and an obstacle to lessen its impact on children. This paper reviews the HIV related stigma and discrimination among children in INDIA with an objective to improve the awareness among public and community regarding the impact of stigma and discrimination on emotional status and scholastic performance of children and also regarding the strategies to overcome it.

Keywords: Stigma Discrimination HIV/AIDS epidemic ridicule dissociate



Meaning-Stigma: HIV stigma is a negative attitude and belief or opinion about children with HIV. It is the preconceived opinion where a child with HIV is socially unaccepted.¹

Stigma is more frequently seen when children affected are blamed for the illness because the illness was looked as contracted because of immoral act. It is not the HIV virus that kills the children but the social stigma. It is well acknowledged that stigma and discrimination contribute to increased HIV/AIDS epidemic.²

HIV related stigma and discrimination persists as a major obstacle to an effective HIV response in all parts of INDIA. (Grace M Lee 2021)

Few live examples of HIV Stigma:

- HIV is highly contagious
- Only certain group of children can get HIV
- HIV Child should stay away from the society
- HIV is a Sin/Curse

Meaning Discrimination:

It is the behavior that results from those attitude or beliefs. HIV discrimination is treating a child living with HIV differently than those without HIV.¹

Few Examples of Discrimination:

- A health care professional refusing to provide care to the child with HIV
- Refusing contact with a child living with HIV
- Socially isolating a child because he is HIV Positive
- Referring to a child as HIVer or Positiver.¹

Effects of Stigma & Discrimination on Child's emotions:

A child living with HIV/AIDS is emotionally disturbed and mentally stressed because of stigma & discrimination. A child living with HIV usually internalizes the stigma he experiences and begin to develop a negative self image. Children are feared that they will be discriminated against or judged negatively if their HIV status is revealed.

What causes HIV stigma:

HIV stigma is rooted in a fear of HIV. Many of the ideas about HIV come from the HIV images that first appeared in the early 1980s. There are still misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted and what it means to live with HIV today. The lack of information and awareness combined with outdated beliefs lead people to fear getting HIV. In addition to this many people think of HIV as a disease that only certain children get. This leads to negative value judgments about children who are living with HIV.

A study was conducted by Thi Thu Nga et al in Vietnam showed that children living with HIV/AIDS are refused to entry to schools or often isolated as school friends dissociate with them. The affected children are also ridiculed, attacked and beaten by their peers. It has also been reported that HIV/AIDS affected children find it difficult to access care and support due to negative attitude by health care providers and other service and support workers. It also noted that stigma can affect children indirectly when caregivers or parents suffer from the effects of stigma and discrimination or when children and parents take certain course of action like withdrawal to avoid expected stigma and discrimination. (Tran M Wanri 2022)³

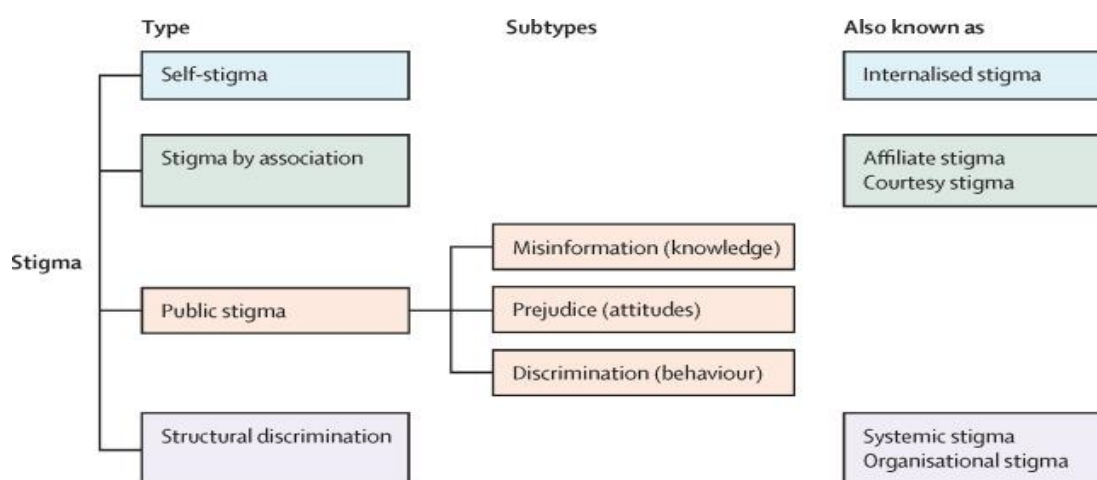
HIV/AIDS Children and Youth: A child who is infected with HIV/AIDS below the age of 25 years are known as HIV/AIDS children and youth (UNICEF, UNAIDS, USAID), in contrast to adults, children and adolescents infected by HIV/AIDS are disproportionately affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and they are at increased vulnerability to stigma and discrimination since they are not responsible for their condition and are less aware to ask for their rights. Stigma can have influence on children in various ways when it advances towards active discrimination like denied entry to schools, separation from school friends, making them orphans, intimidating their living and survival and it worsens their material and psychological problems.



Strategy to overcome HIV Stigma:

- Talking openly about HIV help normalize the subject. It also provides opportunities to correct misconceptions and help others to learn more about HIV.
- We can all help end HIV stigma through our words and actions in our everyday lives. Lead children with our supportive behaviours.
- What we can do for a HIV positive child:
- Show a positive behavior by hugging him
- Share the HIV basics with a child including facts about how HIV is transmitted. “HIV do not spread by hugging, shaking hands or kissing someone who has HIV, HIV can’t survive outside the body.
- Offer to have a conversation and answer any other questions she might have about HIV
- Respond to the child’s misconceptions kindly by explaining the facts.⁴

The Lancet Commission on ending stigma and discrimination in mental health



CONCLUSION

More researches must be conducted to explore the linkages between stigma and HIV services uptake or the effect of HIV care and treatment programs on stigma levels are largely missing and

need to be prioritized. In addition to this more research is needed to advance conceptual understanding of the stigma within the cultural context of the country. Interventions are needed to address the various forms of stigma-enacted, perceived, internalized and layered. Overall the review recommends developing a national agenda on AIDS stigma and discrimination research and interventions to help realize the government's goal of stigma and discrimination reduction.

Declaration by Authors

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