

HIV-Related Stigma and Discrimination in Jordan and Around the World

HIV was first discovered over 40 years ago, and yet HIV-related stigma and discrimination are still prevalent globally. A 2021 report by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) notes that in 25 of 36 countries involved in the study, more than 50 % of people ages 15- 49 years have discriminatory attitudes toward people living with HIV (PLHIV). HIV-related stigma includes avoidance behaviors, social rejection, and physical or verbal attacks. PLHIV also face discrimination such as denial of health or social services, employment, education opportunities, and travel restrictions (“HIV and stigma,” 2021). To be more specific, 21% of PLHIV have reported being denied healthcare in 2020, and 47 countries, most of which are in the Middle East and North Africa region, maintain travel restrictions for PLHIV (“HIV and stigma,” 2021). The stigma and discrimination based on HIV status detrimentally impact the health and well-being of people living with or at risk of HIV/AIDS and significantly impedes the progression of effective HIV response. For instance, the HIV-related stigma and discrimination deter PLHIV and key populations (Kps) from accessing HIV testing and treatment services as well as broader sexual and reproductive health services. Furthermore, discriminatory laws such as punishing same-sex sexual behaviors, and criminalization of HIV exposure, non-disclosure, and transmission further make the PLHIV and Kps more vulnerable to the negative effects of HIV status-based stigma and discrimination. HIV-based stigma and discrimination are violations of PLHIV’s human rights such as the rights to education, healthcare, work, and enjoyment (“HIV and stigma,” 2021). The Global AIDS Societal Enabler Targets 2025 aim to reduce PLHIV who report stigma or discrimination in healthcare and community settings, the Kps who report experiencing stigma or discrimination, the general people who report discriminatory attitudes toward PLHIV, and law enforcement officers who report negative attitudes toward Kps to less than 10 percent (“HIV and stigma,” 2021). In short, there are a lot of challenges in addressing the deep-rooted stigma and discrimination due to HIV phobia and lack of adequate knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

In addition, Jordan has some particularly harsh policies regarding HIV. Healthcare facilities and medical professionals are required to report an individual's HIV status to the government, which poses an issue for HIV-positive foreign nationals, as they will be deported from the country and cannot return. Jordan has this policy even though international laws do not accept deportations based on an individual's HIV status. This can make it especially difficult to access HIV treatment for foreigners in Jordan. The hostile environment toward PLHIV causes both foreigners and Jordanians to delay seeking medical care for HIV/AIDS until they are very ill. For example, the Jordanian criminal justice system has strict HIV-related policies; HIV-positive individuals are denied access to proper medical treatment in prison and isolated from others (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Along with these strict policies, public discussion about sexually transmitted infections is taboo in Jordan, further contributing to discrimination toward PLHIV. A recent study by Jordanian medical students indicates that only 41% of students knew that HIV can be transmitted through breastfeeding, and only 49% knew that prevention of this

transmission is possible. While this study found that most participants held a positive attitude toward PLHIV, around 1/3 of the medical students held a negative attitude toward those living with HIV. This study also found that greater knowledge about HIV was generally correlated with positive attitudes toward HIV (Sallam et al. 2022). The results from this study show that there is still a long way to go to inform the public about HIV/AIDS. Though it is encouraging to find that there is hope that with more education about HIV, the stigma surrounding it could be diminished. There is a lot of work to be done to adequately address the health and well-being of PLHIV in Jordan and across the world.

References

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Stories of gender-based violence victims

Gender-based violence (GBV) is prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN refugee agency, defines GBV as harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms. (UNHCR, 2022). Women in the MENA region are often subjected to GBV due to the conservative culture and extreme religious practice.

References

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). *Gender-based violence*. UNHCR. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from <https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html>