Stigma index of people living with HIV in Quebec, Canada: portrait of anticipated stigma.

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Context:

Stigma still persists as a profound stressor in the lives of people living with HIV (PLWHIV) affecting many aspects of their lives. To better understand the social determinants of HIV-related stigma in the province of Quebec in Canada, an intersectoral team in collaboration with Reach Nexus, conducted the PLWHIV Stigma Index.

Methodology:

In 2019, a questionnaire was administered face-to-face to 281 PLWHIV. These interviews were conducted by 9 peer research associates. This study focuses on Earnshaw's Anticipatory Stigma of Chronic Illness Scale, which is a score taking into account awareness of negative social attitudes, fear of discrimination, and feelings of shame. The association between sociodemographic data and other measures of stigma and the anticipatory stigma score were assessed using a multivariate linear regression using a backward procedure.

Results:

The mean anticipatory stigma score recorded was 2.7 (for a score ranging from 1 to 5). A multivariate analysis showed that a higher score was associated with a higher internalized stigma score (β=0.330, 95% confidence interval (95%CI): 0.118–0.236), a current lack of emotional and informational support (β=-0.210, 95%CI: -0.337–-0.111), the presence of depression (mild to severe) in the last 12 months (β=0.161, 95%CI: 0.110–0.564) , identifying as female (compared to identifying as male) (β=0.135, 95%CI: 0.061–0.498, p=0.012) and have a university level of education (compared to secondary

education or lower) (β=0.126, 95%CI: 0.049–0.544, p=0.019). The education level was especially associated with the anticipated stigma index of family and relatives.

Conclusion:

These data highlight the relationship between the anticipation of HIV status disclosure and low self-esteem (as shown with a higher internalized stigma) and depressive symptoms. This reaffirms the community need for personal empowerment of PLWHIV. The findings indicate the importance of developing and consolidating sources of emotional and informational social support through the identification of trustworthy people in the social environment or peer support. In addition, anticipated stigma seemed to be stronger in people identifying as female. It indicates that special care should be taken for this particular population, which is overrepresented among racialized people.