

Experiences of HIV stigma among Blue Sky Trust (BST) members: A service evaluation

Background

HIV stigma, defined as negative attitudes and beliefs held about people with HIV, is one of the biggest current challenges in the response to HIV (CDC, 2022). Stigma is linked with depression, less social support, lower adherence to antiretroviral medication, and poorer physical health (Rueda et al., 2016).

Methods

This collaborative project was approved by the Blue Sky Trust (BST) advisory board & registered with Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals (NuTH) as a service evaluation.

- Surveys (N = 20) and interviews (N = 6) were used to collect demographic data, experiences of stigma, and ideas about how BST could respond.
- Thematic Analysis (Clarke et al., 2015) was used to analyse qualitative data.

Aims

- To gather examples of HIV stigma from BST members.
- To identify settings where stigma occurs.
- To find out what members think BST can do to support them with experiences of stigma, and to tackle stigma.

Participants

Of 20 people who took part, most were White British (85%), aged between 50-59 years (55%), male (65%), and had lived with HIV for more than 10 years (55%). Half identified as heterosexual.

Survey Results

HIV stigma had been experienced by 85% of participants. Dating apps (53%), workplace (47%), dating (41%) and in healthcare (41%) were the most common sources.

Stigma caused people to feel mentally (88%) and physically (77%) worse, embarrassed (48%) and socially isolated (47%). Some people felt stronger (18%) and more resilient (35%) because of stigma, but most did not agree with this.

Promotion in public places (28%), education (22%), training (17%), and better sexual health education in schools (11%) were among suggestions for tackling stigma. The general public, healthcare professionals and police were suggested targets for interventions.

Interview Themes



My cannula removed during the night, and blood was gushing out of my hand. I pressed the buzzer and a male nurse came, but he wouldn't help me. When another nurse came to help me, he told her that she should be careful with my blood

I found that the attitude to HIV amongst the gay population in the North East is, I find it very negative

I am these days almost indifferent, apathetic. It is a waste of time expressing anything as it always gets twisted by medical staff

It's happened so many times when they've isolated me off into rooms on my own when I've been admitted, and they tell me that they're doing that because of the HIV... My greatest desire would be to have HIV removed from my medical records

When you tell people for instance, it's a weight off your head, and I think it's made me a lot more open to people

...and the words they used just, you know, made me feel dirty

Provide support to allow victims of stigma to use that experience as a tool to educate others about the facts around living with HIV in 2022

When you tell people, it's a weight off your head, and I think it's made me a lot more open to people

Source of HIV Stigma	Number	%
Dating Apps	9	53%
Workplace	8	47%
Dating	7	41%
Medical Setting	7	41%
Family	6	35%
Friends	6	35%
Partner	5	29%
Dental Practice	4	24%
Police	2	12%
Religious Setting	2	12%
Addiction Services	1	6%
Bank/Building Society	1	6%
Department for Work and Pensions	1	6%
Education Setting	1	6%
Financial Services	1	6%
Hair/Beauty	1	6%
In a Public Place	1	6%
Job Searching	1	6%
Social Media	1	6%
Social Services	1	6%
Tattoo/Piercing	1	6%

Addressing Stigma



References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). HIV stigma and discrimination. Facts about HIV Stigma | HIV Basics | HIV/AIDS | CDC
 Clarke, V., Braun, V., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Thematic analysis. Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods, 222, 248.
 Rueda, S., Mitra, S., Chen, S., Gogolishvili, D., Globerman, J., Chambers, L., Wilson, M., Logie, C.H., Shi, Q., Morassaei, S., Rourke, S. B. (2016). Examining the associations between HIV-related stigma and health outcomes in people living with HIV/AIDS: a series of meta-analyses. *BMJ open*, 6(7), e011453