

Disclosure patterns among HIV positive widows and associated social reactions

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Abstract

HIV widows not only bear the grief of their husbands' death and subsequent economic repercussions, but also have to face the stigma of being HIV positive. Being HIV positive is strongly associated with "sexual promiscuousness" which evokes stigma and discrimination. Widowhood itself carries numerous social and cultural challenges which get exacerbated further with acquisition of HIV. Therefore, decisions pertaining towards the disclosure of HIV status by the widows assume much significance in the face of attached stigma and discrimination. Decision about disclosure often poses as an unsolved question for HIV infected widows as it may either entail rejection and abandonment by the society or may result in enhanced social support. The present study is an attempt to understand the disclosure patterns among HIV positive widows towards their families, children and neighbors and seeks to learn about the following reactions. Purposive sampling was used to select 50 HIV positive widows from HIV clinic at New Delhi, India. Semi-structured interviews were used as data collection tool to gather the information regarding disclosure patterns with in-laws, natal family, children and the neighbors. Qualitative approach using thematic analysis has been carried out. Results revealed natal family as a dominant support system for all the respondents. Majority of the respondents shared a hostile relationship with in-laws. Most of the women were subjected to extreme forms of stigma and discrimination. Interestingly, it emerged that financial dependence of the respondents and her children upon the in-laws was a bigger reason than HIV stigma which led to constrained relations with in-laws. Further, it was noticed that disclosure towards the children appeared to be calculative which was made after several thoughts by the respondent. The results further highlighted strong support from the neighbors who emerged as a support mechanism in everyday life as well as in emergency situations.

Key words: HIV, Widows, Disclosure, Stigma, Discrimination