

Disentangling HIV and AIDS Stigma in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zambia

Nyblade, L., Pande, R., Mathur, S., MacQuarrie, K., Kidd, R., Banteyerga, H., Kidanu, A., Kilonzo, G., Mbwambo, J., Bond, V. (2003). *Disentangling HIV and AIDS Stigma in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia*. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women.



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Stigma and discrimination (S&D) related to HIV and AIDS have been recognized, since the beginning of the HIV epidemic, as significant barriers to delivery and uptake of effective prevention, care, and treatment programs globally. Yet, in 2000—two decades into the epidemic—a basic understanding of the causes, manifestations, and consequences of HIV- and AIDS-related stigma and discrimination was lacking, along with an understanding of whether and how they varied by context and what interventions were needed to reduce S&D.

This multi-country comparative study in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zambia responded to this knowledge gap by conducting 650 interviews and 80 focus group discussions among a broad range of stakeholders from both rural and urban sites in each country, including health professionals, educators, employers, nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, persons living with HIV, youth, sex workers, caregivers, and other community members.

Analysis of the data found that, despite the differing contexts of the sites, there were more commonalities than differences in key causes, forms, and consequences of HIV-related S&D. Key immediately actionable causes of S&D include a lack of awareness of S&D (what it is and what it does), unfounded fears of HIV transmission through casual contact with people living with HIV, and the association of HIV with behaviors considered socially “improper” or immoral, leading to shame and blame. As a result, people living with HIV can face physical and social isolation from family, friends, and community; violence; gossip, name-calling, and voyeurism; and a loss of rights, decision-making power, and access to resources and livelihoods. The fear, or actual experience, of S&D can keep people from practicing HIV prevention and seeking and adhering to HIV treatment.

The study finding that differences across settings were more about nuance than substance led to the development of globally-applicable S&D-reduction tools and programs.

Link: <http://www.icrw.org/publications/disentangling-hiv-and-aids-stigma-ethiopia-tanzania-and-zambia>