

## ABSTRACT

Examining the Impact of Fear and Perception of Risk on Stigma towards Persons Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) and HIV Testing Intentions: A Study Conducted in a Community in Trinidad.

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The sustained impact of stigma on PLHIV contributes to protracting the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Stigma exposes PLHIV to discrimination, and erodes prevention strategies, particularly, HIV testing. This research examines the impact of fear and perception of risk on stigma towards PLHIV and HIV testing intentions. The functional approach to HIV/AIDS-related attitudes by Pryor et al. (1989) directed this study. The functional approach postulates that attitudes towards PLHIV reflect concerns about contagion and moral judgments, or instrumental and symbolic functions.

Survey methodology was employed for Study 1 and 2, and data were collected through face- to- face interviews with residents of a community in Trinidad. A total of 365 respondents participated in Study 1 and 185 in Study 2. For both

studies there were 50 % males and 50% females, and ages ranged from 18-85 years. Multiple regression and Sobel test for mediation were employed.

Fear, risk and gender contributed significantly to the prediction of stigma,  $F(4, 347) = 55.54, p < .001, R^2_{adj} = .38$ . Risk ( $z = 4.63, P < .001$ ) mediated fear and stigma. Fear and risk contributed significantly to the prediction of testing intentions,  $F(5, 346) = 18.81, p < .001, R^2_{adj} = .20$ . Risk ( $z = 2.54, p < .011$ ) mediated fear and testing intentions.

Awareness, testing history and age contributed significantly to the prediction of testing intentions,  $F(7,177) = 9.30, p < .001, R^2_{adj} = .24$ . Awareness and risk contributed significantly to the prediction of stigma,  $F(6,178) = 7.72, p < .001, R^2_{adj} = .18$ .

The findings provide further insights into the determinants of stigma towards PLHIV and factors influencing HIV testing in a Caribbean context. These insights informed recommendations for HIV prevention interventions and future research. Moreover, these recommendations can support strategies to change the trajectory of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and achieve an AIDS-free generation in the Caribbean.

Keywords: Rosana P. Yearwood; HIV/AIDS; stigma; PLHIV; HIV testing intentions; fear; perception of risk.