

ABSTRACT

HIV POLICIES/PROGRAMMES IN THE WORKPLACE - THEIR IMPACT ON HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION IN KINGSTON AND ST. ANDREW

Demetri Wint

HIV-associated stigma and discrimination forms a part of a vicious cycle operating and reinforcing each other. In Jamaica HIV-related stigma and discrimination is not unknown. This study analyses the impact of company HIV/AIDS policies on HIV-related stigma and discrimination in Kingston and St. Andrew.

Self administered questionnaires were administered to 154 employees in three companies in Kingston and St. Andrew. Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with Persons Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) who work/worked in companies located in Kingston and St. Andrew.

Reports of overt expression of stigma were minimal. Persons who were diagnosed with HIV five or more years ago were more likely to be targets of overt expression of discriminating attitudes than persons diagnosed less than three years.

Most respondents showed discriminatory attitudes towards homosexual males infected with HIV/AIDS. These attitudes were particularly prevalent in the less than 29 age group where 43.6% of persons indicated that they felt anger towards a homosexual male. There was no difference in the level of sympathy shown to heterosexual males and heterosexual females (not prostitute). However, respondents were less sympathetic towards heterosexual female prostitutes. More covert forms of stigma were noted. Respondents felt uncomfortable having contact or sharing items used by PLWHA. Forty two percent of male and female respondents indicated that maybe they would consider sharing tools and equipment with PLWHA.

Overall workplace programmes seem to have an impact on the knowledge of HIV/AIDS and stigma and discriminatory attitudes. This impact was greater in companies that exhibited workplace HIV best practices such as having a HIV policy and specific HIV- related programmes. It must be acknowledged that the development of workplace policies and programmes has been a recent event in Jamaica. It therefore remains too early to evaluate such programmes.

Key words: HIV/AIDS, stigma, discrimination, HIV policy, HIV programmes

Kingston and St. Andrew