



STIGMA TOWARD PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS: NURSING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES AS PREPARATION FOR LONG-TERM CARE

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ABSTRACT

As of 2022, an estimated 39 million people were living with HIV (PLHIV) globally, with approximately two-thirds—or 25.6 million—residing in the African region. In the same year, HIV was responsible for approximately 630,000 deaths worldwide. Individuals living with HIV are particularly susceptible to stigma, which can adversely affect their quality of life. HIV-related stigma has been shown to significantly impact the health outcomes, daily lives, and overall well-being of PLHIV, particularly within key populations. Objective: This study aims to examine nursing students' perceptions of HIV-related stigma. Method: This type of research is a qualitative research with narrative design. In-depth interviews was data collection techniques with informants determined by purposive sampling technique with a total of 8 Nursing Students. The research instrument is the researcher himself and the collection of data through interviews and documentation. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved reviewing the transcripts and categorizing the data into themes. The next step involved coding, where labels were assigned to each relevant piece of information. Results: Through interviews, four main themes emerged, illustrating students' attitudes, challenges, and readiness in engaging with people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) Conclusions: Despite possessing adequate knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS transmission, nursing students' perceptions in providing care for PLWHA remain influenced by prevailing social stigma.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS; nursing student; stigma

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INTRODUCTION

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is an infection that attacks the body's immune system. Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a syndrome that represents the advanced stage of HIV infection. In 2023, there were approximately 39.9 million people living with HIV (PLHIV) globally, with two-thirds (about 25.6 million) residing in Africa. During the same year, HIV-related deaths reached 630,000 worldwide. Some countries reported an increase in HIV cases, reversing previously declining trends. In Indonesia, the total number of PLHIV was estimated at 570,000 people in 2023, with 27,000 deaths attributed to HIV/AIDS. In Bali, one of Indonesia's provinces, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) reached 28,376 in 2022 (CDC, 2022; Sumada & Samudra, 2023; UNAIDS/WHO, 2024; UNAIDS, 2024; WHO, 2023, 2024). HIV-AIDS-related mortality in Indonesia has shown a rising trend in prevalence from 2010 to 2023. The increase in deaths among PLWHA is influenced by their quality of life, particularly in relation to opportunistic infections (OIs). OIs commonly occur when CD4+ counts fall below 200 cells/mm³. Adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART) is essential for preventing the decline in CD4 levels. However, stigma has been identified as one of the major factors contributing to poor ART adherence (Bosh et al., 2020; Liyanovitasari & Setyoningrum, 2024).

People living with HIV/AIDS are particularly vulnerable to stigma, which affects their quality of life. HIV-related stigma significantly impacts health outcomes, overall well-being, and the social inclusion of PLWHA, especially within key populations. The consequences of stigma include increased risk of HIV progression, exposure to violence, marginalization, and restricted access to education, employment, and justice. Forms of stigma include prohibited behaviors, gossip, verbal abuse, and social rejection. In 25 out of 36 countries, discriminatory attitudes toward PLWHA remain prevalent. In Indonesia, approximately 40–50% of PLWHA experience community discrimination, and 67–68% report being discriminated against by family or close relations. According to the Research Officer of the Research, Community Development, and Media Division of JIP, data from 1,400 respondents across 16 provinces in Indonesia showed that 35.9% of PLWHA internalized stigma, and 13.4% experienced external stigma (Haikal, 2024; Nursalam et al., 2022; UNAIDS, 2021).

People living with HIV/AIDS face persistent challenges related to stigma, which negatively affects their health, particularly in the context of long-term care (LTC). The AIDS phase is characterized by complex health conditions that necessitate LTC in order to improve quality of life. The nature of LTC for PLWHA depends on the phase of illness: during the acute phase, ART adherence is prioritized, while in the AIDS phase, care is more symptom-focused, responding to the health problems experienced by the patient. Nurses play a crucial role in long-term care for PLWHA, helping to prevent transmission and improve quality of life. A comprehensive understanding of HIV-related stigma is essential for nurses to avoid perpetuating fear or shame among PLWHA in accessing care. Nursing students, as the next generation of healthcare providers, must be prepared to understand and address HIV-related stigma in order to deliver effective long-term care to PLWHA in the future. This study aims to analyze students' perspectives on stigma towards people with HIV/AIDS as preparation for providing long-term care.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a narrative design. The primary data consisted of interview transcripts, which were subsequently narrated. The participants were eight second-semester nursing students from ITEKES Bali, selected through purposive sampling. The number of respondents used was 8 8 Nursing Students. Inclusion criteria included: active second-semester nursing students at ITEKES Bali and willingness to participate in the study. Exclusion criterion: students who experienced difficulties during the interview process. Data collection instruments included a demographic questionnaire capturing initials, age, and gender, as well as a semi-structured interview guide focusing on students' perceptions of HIV-related stigma. Interviews lasted an average of 15 to 30 minutes. The research procedure began with obtaining informed consent, followed by the interview process. Prior to the interview, participants completed the demographic form. The interviews were conducted using the interview guide and were audio-recorded. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved reviewing the transcripts and categorizing the data into themes. The next step involved coding, where labels were assigned to each relevant piece of information. Finally, the data were developed into narrative descriptions based on the identified themes and subsequently interpreted.

RESULT

This study aimed to explore nursing students' perceptions of stigma towards people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and their readiness to provide long-term care. Based on in-depth interviews with eight second-semester nursing students at ITEKES Bali, one major theme emerged: "Stigma and Challenges in Caring for PLWHA." This overarching theme is composed of four sub-themes that reflect the psychological and professional dynamics students experience when confronting stigma and preparing to care for PLWHA.

Doubts in Providing Care

Although most participants demonstrated a sound understanding of HIV transmission, they still expressed hesitation and uncertainty when faced with real-life situations involving PLWHA. For instance:

"At first, I thought HIV/AIDS was very easy to catch. But after studying it in class, I realized it's not that dangerous. Still, I can't help but feel a bit anxious." (Participant 1)

"I know it's safe if we understand the modes of transmission, but voices from people around me still make me hesitant..." (Participant 2)

These doubts appear to be influenced by external factors, such as family and societal perceptions, which contribute to lingering discomfort in interacting with PLWHA.

Progressive Attitudes Toward Stigma

Several students expressed a willingness to overcome their initial fears and develop professional approaches. Despite residual anxiety, they were gradually building confidence and openness.

"Honestly, I still have some concerns, but I'm getting braver about engaging with PLWHA." (Participant 3)

"I used to be very afraid, but now I try to be more open." (Participant 4)

These attitudes indicate a motivation to grow professionally and act in accordance with scientific understanding and nursing ethics.

The Need to Strengthen Competence

Participants felt they needed further education and training to boost their confidence and preparedness, especially through case-based and simulation learning.

"I think if we had more frequent and clearer education, stigma would slowly fade." (Participant 5)

"If we had more case simulations, I believe more students would become more confident." (Participant 6)

This underscores the importance of integrating experiential learning into nursing curricula to foster competence in caring for PLWHA.

Readiness Accompanied by Initial Anxiety

Some students stated that they felt academically ready to provide long-term care for PLWHA, but their limited clinical exposure led to feelings of anxiety and nervousness.

"I feel fairly ready to care for PLWHA in the long term, but I still get nervous." (Participant 7)

"I'm willing and prepared, but since it's all new, I still feel a bit worried." (Participant 8)

These responses suggest that technical readiness must be supported by mental and emotional preparation.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that academic knowledge alone is insufficient to eliminate deeply rooted social stigma among nursing students. Although participants understand HIV transmission pathways correctly, their concerns persist due to social and cultural influences that perpetuate negative perceptions of PLWHA. This aligns with Parker and Aggleton (2003), who argue that stigma toward HIV/AIDS is more a product of social construction than a lack of medical understanding. **Doubts and Social Influences:** Students' hesitation is shaped by values held within their social environments, including familial and community perspectives. This supports the view that attitudinal change requires more than knowledge dissemination—it must address deeper value systems and belief structures (Corrigan et al., 2005; de Paoli et al., 2015). **Professional Efforts to Confront Stigma:** Some students demonstrated growing confidence and a professional mindset, indicating the role of self-efficacy in overcoming stigma. According to Bandura's theory (1997), knowledge combined with positive

experiences enhances one's ability to face challenging situations with reduced anxiety. The Importance of Experience-Based Training: The participants' call for more practical training highlights the need for case-based learning and simulation in nursing education. Prior research by Mendenhall et al. (2014) and McKinney et al. (2010) supports this approach, suggesting that such training improves empathy, communication skills, and confidence in caring for PLWHA. Readiness That Is Not Fully Mature: The students' narratives of feeling "ready but anxious" indicate that cognitive readiness must be accompanied by emotional resilience. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory explains that anxiety is common when encountering unfamiliar clinical experiences. Therefore, strengthening both technical and emotional preparedness through guided exposure is crucial for developing professional competence.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that although nursing students possess sufficient theoretical knowledge, societal stigma and lack of hands-on experience remain significant barriers to their readiness in providing long-term care for PLWHA. A more holistic educational approach—emphasizing real-life case exposure and professional value formation—is needed to develop comprehensive preparedness.

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