



International Conference and Exhibition on

VIROLOGY

5-7 September 2011 Baltimore, USA

Complexities of HIV/AIDS Stigma and its impact on care seeking behavior of people living with HIV/AIDS: A qualitative study in Nigeria

Ngozi C. Mbonu
Maastricht University, The Netherlands

Although the current antiretroviral therapy (ART) gives a good prognostic outcome in terms of reduced morbidity and increased survival, still The Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) poses a major health challenge throughout the world but especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Not only does the discovery that one is infected with HIV lead to fear of progression into AIDS and fear of dying, it also creates an anticipation of negative social reactions among people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). HIV related Stigma constitutes a social disease which affects PLWHA seeking care in health care institutions and from significant others.

Aim: This study aims to describe the stigmatizing experiences, coping mechanisms and care-seeking behaviour of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, while applying an explanatory model of the role of stigma in care-seeking behaviour of PLWHA. We also explored the possible role of contextual factors related to the stigmatization.

Method: In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 PLWHA who belong to a network association in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. One focus group discussion was held.

Results: Using the explanatory model from our previous research for interpretation, we identified determining and moderating factors affecting PLWHA seeking care. In addition, three coping mechanisms that PLWHA may utilize to cope with HIV/AIDS were contextualized. First, coping with self such as physical appearance, emotional and cognitive problems, second, coping directed at others in the social environment, and third, coping directed at solving problems related to the HIV/AIDS disease. Poverty and religion were found to be important in making care choices which affect utilization of health care institutions. Additionally, power differences in marital relations were found to play an important role at the time of HIV diagnosis and coping with this diagnosis.

Conclusion: This study identified factors associated with care seeking choices and coping mechanisms. The explanatory model relating stigma to these processes is useful in structuring experiences of PLWHA and uncovering targets of intervention. Policy implications are discussed and continuing education of PLWHA and of people in society on HIV/AIDS, on options of ART-treatment, on HIV/AIDS related stigma and on possibilities for care and supporting networks are recommended.

Biography

Ngozi C. Mbonu studied Medicine graduating with a Bachelors Degree of Medicine and Bachelors Degree of Surgery from University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She underwent Laser Therapy training at Department of Dermatology, Phlebology and Laser Therapy, Medical Center Maastricht, The Netherlands. She obtained a Masters Degree in Public Health (MPH) and a Doctorate degree (PHD) from Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University, The Netherlands.

She has published scientific papers and books chapters on HIV/AIDS as well as related to use of laser therapy for dermatological purposes. She works as Doctor in Clinical Research with the Department of Dermatology, Phlebology and Laser Therapy, Medical Center Maastricht, The Netherlands. In addition, she holds Teaching and Research responsibilities with the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University, The Netherlands.