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# HIV-related stigma was highly-prevalent in Lesotho among those living with and without HIV. Targeted stigma reduction is critical as a social enabler in reaching testing and treatment targets.

## Prevalence and correlates of HIV-related stigma among people living with and without HIV in representative sample of population in Lesotho

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### Background

HIV-related stigma is a notable barrier to HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. We assessed the prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of self-reported HIV-related stigma and discriminatory attitudes among people living with HIV (PLWH) and people not living with HIV (PNLWH) in Lesotho, a high prevalence country in southern Africa.

### Methods

We used the Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (LePHIA), a cross-sectional, household-based survey that used two-stage sampling to collect nationally representative data from adults aged ≥15 years. Between 2016-2017, data from interviews, home-based HIV testing, and laboratory testing were collected. Questions from the HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes module were used to characterize self-reported HIV-related stigma into five categories (Table 1). Multivariable logistic regression was used to determine socio-demographic factors associated with HIV-related stigma in PLWH (n=3,199) and PNLWH (N=8,483) aged 15-59 years.

Table 1: Definitions and categorizations of HIV-related stigma in Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment 2016-2017

| HIV-related stigma                | HIV-related stigma PHIA questions in HIV testing and knowledge & attitudes module   | Response |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------|
| <b>People living without HIV</b>  |   |          |
| Discriminatory behavior           | "Would you buy fresh vegetables from a shopkeeper or vendor if you knew that this person had HIV?"  | No       |
|                                   | "Do you think that children living with HIV should be able to attend school with children who are HIV negative?"  | No       |
| Stigmatizing attitudes            | "I would be ashamed if someone in my family had HIV"  | Agree    |
|                                   | "Do people talk badly about people who are living with HIV or who are thought to be living with HIV?"   | Yes      |
|                                   | "Do people living with HIV, or thought to be living with HIV, lose the respect of other people?"  | Yes      |
|                                   | "Do you think people hesitate to take an HIV test because they are afraid of how other people will react if the test result is positive for HIV?"       | Yes      |
| <b>People living with HIV</b>     |   |          |
| Internalized stigma               | "Would you buy fresh vegetables from a shopkeeper or vendor if you knew that this person had HIV?"  | No       |
|                                   | "Do you think that children living with HIV should be able to attend school with children who are HIV negative?"  | No       |
|                                   | "Do people talk badly about people who are living with HIV or who are thought to be living with HIV?"   | Yes      |
|                                   | "Do people living with HIV, or thought to be living with HIV, lose the respect of other people?"  | Yes      |
| Received and institutional stigma | "In the last 12 months, have you been denied health services including dental care, because of your HIV status?"  | Yes      |
|                                   | "In the last 12 months, when you sought health care in a facility where your HIV status is not known, did you feel you needed to hide your HIV status?" | Yes      |
| Associated stigma                 | "I would be ashamed if someone in my family had HIV"  | Yes      |
|                                   | "Do you think people hesitate to take an HIV test because they are afraid of how other people will react if the test result is positive for HIV?"       | Yes      |

### Results

#### Prevalence of stigma among PLWH (N=3,199)

- Internalized stigma: 36.7% (95% CI: 35.0-38.4)
- Associated stigma: 40.9% (95% CI: 39.0-42.8)
- Received and institutional stigma: 6.63% (95% CI: 5.63-7.79)

#### Adjusted correlates of stigma among PLWH:

- Higher wealth quintiles had significantly higher adjusted odds of internalized stigma (Figure 1)
- Older PLWH had significantly higher adjusted odds of received and institutional stigma

#### Prevalence of stigma among PNLWH (N= 8,483)

- Discriminatory behavior: 9.93% (95% CI: 9.24-10.7)
- Stigmatizing attitudes: 43.2% (95% CI: 41.9-44.4)

#### Adjusted correlates of stigma among PNLWH:

- Older PLWH had significantly higher adjusted odds of received and institutional stigma
- Men, young people, those with lower education, and those in the lowest wealth quintile had significantly higher adjusted odds of discriminatory behavior towards PLWH (Figure 1)

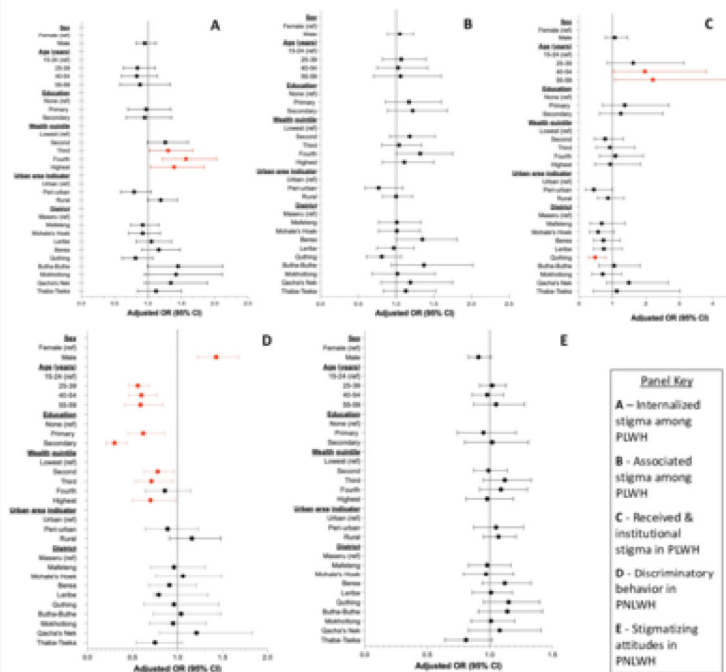
### Conclusions

In this nationally representative sample of persons in Lesotho, HIV-related stigma was highly prevalent, among both PLWH and PNLWH. Prioritization of addressing factors associated with stigma through HIV education and awareness for men, young people, and those from lower socioeconomic strata is paramount. HIV-related stigma reduction efforts in health services are needed, particularly for those providing care for older PLWH. Support for PLWH is necessary to address internalized stigma across socioeconomic strata.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of PLWH & PNLWH aged 15-59 years

|                               | People living with HIV (N=3,199) |             | People not living with HIV (N=8,483) |             | Total (N=11,682) |             |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
|                               | %                                | 95% CI      | %                                    | 95% CI      | %                | 95% CI      |
| <b>Sex</b>                    |                                  |             |                                      |             |                  |             |
| Male                          | 40.7                             | [38.9,42.6] | 53.3                                 | [52.2,54.4] | 50.1             | [49.1,51.0] |
| Female                        | 59.3                             | [57.4,61.1] | 46.7                                 | [45.6,47.8] | 49.9             | [49.0,50.9] |
| <b>Age categories (years)</b> |                                  |             |                                      |             |                  |             |
| 15-24                         | 9.6                              | [8.6,10.8]  | 42.5                                 | [41.2,43.8] | 34.1             | [33.1,35.2] |
| 25-39                         | 49.6                             | [47.5,51.7] | 37.7                                 | [36.3,39.1] | 40.8             | [39.6,42.0] |
| 40-54                         | 34.5                             | [32.8,36.3] | 15.2                                 | [14.3,16.2] | 20.1             | [19.3,21.0] |
| 55-59                         | 6.2                              | [5.4,7.1]   | 4.5                                  | [4.1,5.0]   | 5                | [4.6,5.4]   |
| <b>Education level</b>        |                                  |             |                                      |             |                  |             |
| No education                  | 7.3                              | [6.4,8.3]   | 4.2                                  | [3.7,4.7]   | 5                | [4.5,5.5]   |
| Primary                       | 51.5                             | [49.4,53.6] | 35.6                                 | [34.0,37.3] | 39.7             | [38.2,41.3] |
| Secondary or higher           | 41                               | [39.1,43.1] | 60.1                                 | [58.3,61.9] | 55.2             | [53.6,56.8] |
| <b>Urban Area Indicator</b>   |                                  |             |                                      |             |                  |             |
| Urban                         | 43.3                             | [40.6,46.1] | 40.5                                 | [38.1,43.0] | 41.2             | [39.9,43.6] |
| Peri-urban                    | 6.9                              | [4.5,10.4]  | 7.9                                  | [5.6,10.9]  | 7.6              | [5.4,10.7]  |
| Rural                         | 49.8                             | [46.4,53.2] | 51.6                                 | [48.5,54.8] | 51.2             | [48.1,54.2] |
| <b>District name</b>          |                                  |             |                                      |             |                  |             |
| Maseru                        | 34.6                             | [32.4,36.8] | 30.9                                 | [29.2,32.6] | 31.8             | [30.3,33.4] |
| Mafeteng                      | 8.8                              | [7.6,10.3]  | 8.5                                  | [7.4,9.8]   | 8.6              | [7.5,9.8]   |
| Mohale's Hoek                 | 6.6                              | [5.7,7.6]   | 5.5                                  | [4.9,6.1]   | 5.7              | [5.2,6.4]   |
| Leribe                        | 16.2                             | [14.7,17.9] | 18                                   | [17.1,18.9] | 17.5             | [16.6,18.4] |
| Berea                         | 12.9                             | [11.0,14.9] | 14.8                                 | [13.7,16.0] | 14.3             | [13.2,15.5] |
| Quthing                       | 4.1                              | [3.3,5.0]   | 3.9                                  | [3.2,4.7]   | 3.9              | [3.4,4.6]   |
| Butha-Butha                   | 3.6                              | [3.0,4.2]   | 5.6                                  | [5.0,6.3]   | 5.1              | [4.6,5.7]   |
| Mokhotlong                    | 4.8                              | [3.8,6.2]   | 4.7                                  | [4.0,5.5]   | 4.7              | [4.1,5.5]   |
| Qacha's Nek                   | 2.5                              | [1.9,3.3]   | 2.5                                  | [2.0,3.0]   | 2.5              | [2.1,2.9]   |
| Thaba-Tseka                   | 5.9                              | [4.8,7.2]   | 5.7                                  | [4.9,6.7]   | 5.8              | [5.0,6.7]   |

Figure 1: Adjusted odds ratios of socio-demographic correlates of different types of stigma among PLWH and PNLWH



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