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HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination: Accounts of HIV-positive Caribbean people in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This paper explores the effects of HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination (HASD) on HIV-positive Caribbean people in the Caribbean and the UK. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with a purposively selected group of 25 HIV-positive people of Caribbean origin, using primary selection criteria of sex, age, sexuality and country of birth. Interviews with respondents revealed that they are keenly aware of the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, which some attribute to a particularly Caribbean combination of fear of contamination, homophobia, and ignorance, reinforced by religious beliefs. In fact, religion serves a double role: underpinning stigma and assisting in coping with HIV. HASD has usually occurred where respondents have lost or do not have control over disclosure. Compared to UK-born respondents, the accounts of Caribbean-born respondents, most of whom were born in Jamaica, include more reports

of severe HASD, particularly violence and employment discrimination. All respondents mobilise a variety of strategies in order to avoid HASD, which have implications for their social interactions and emotional well being. While some manage to avoid the 'spoiled identity' of the stigmatised, thereby creating their own understandings of HIV infection, these may remain individual-level negotiations. HASD affects HIV-positive Caribbean people at home and in the diaspora in a variety of ways: emotionally, mentally, financially, socially and physically. Interventions specifically addressing stigma and discrimination must be formulated for the UK's Caribbean population. Tackling stigma and discrimination requires more than education; it requires 'cultural work' to address deeply entrenched notions of sexuality.



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Keywords

HIV/AIDS; Stigma; Discrimination; Caribbean; UK; Black

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