Voices of the Hidden: Implementation of the People Living with HIV Stigma Index in Taiwan

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Background
Stigma toward HIV/AIDS has been recognized as a major barrier in ending the global epidemic. HIV stigma deters high risk populations to access equitable medical and psychosocial support. However, the formation of stigma in the society is a complex process and the measurement of stigma is difficult to approach. The aim of the study was to estimate the HIV stigma in Taiwan by measuring the discrimination encountered by people living with HIV in the society.

Method
During April 2017 to December 2017, a nationwide survey enrolling 842 (3% total HIV positive population) people living with HIV in Taiwan was conducted using the People Living with HIV Stigma Index questionnaire (Ref 1) developed by GPNI+ (The Global Network of People Living with HIV), UNAIDS (The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) and ICW (The International Community of Women Living with HIV). The People Living with HIV Stigma Index questionnaire were filled during the 1 to 1 interviews. Quantitative data were extracted and international comparisons were done by gathering the official reports on stigmaindex.org website and UNAIDS Confronting Discrimination (Ref2) report.

Result
Demographic Characteristics
Among the demographic characteristics, the physiologic gender distribution was similar to the PLHIV population in Taiwan, with 96.6% male and 3.1% female (Figure 1A). Men who have sex with men (MSM) was the major key population (Figure 1B). About 65% of participants were younger than 40 years-old (Figure 1C) and 47% of participants had been living with HIV for less than 5 years (Figure 1D).

Disclosure and Discrimination
The difference of status disclosure among different groups of people surrounding PLHIV may be related to the extent of discrimination perceived from these people. Figure 5 showed the discriminatory reactions from different populations if the participant’s HIV status was disclosed to them without consent.

International Comparisons
Taiwan is at a middle place when compared internationally on HIV stigma/discrimination. More actions need to be taken in order to conquer HIV stigma and to achieve zero-discrimination against HIV in Taiwan.

Conclusion
Much HIV associated stigma and discrimination still exists in Taiwan by evaluation with the People Living with HIV Index. Our study pointed out that status disclosure without consent plays a critical role in the formation of HIV stigma/discrimination against PLHIV. Besides strengthening the PLHIV right protection laws, associated authorities should use this data to emphasize the importance of keeping the confidentiality of PLHIV.

References
1. http://www.stigmaindex.org

International Partnership
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