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Disclosure, Stigma and Discrimination among Sub-Saharan African Migrant Women with HIV/AIDS in Belgium

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Globally, an estimated 36.7 million people are living with HIV, of which 25.5 million are living in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). About 29,864 people have been diagnosed with HIV in Belgium since 1981. Women are more likely than men to contract HIV. This pattern is mirrored among SSA migrant women living in Belgium. The number of registered patients in medical care was about 15,266 in 2016. About 68% of women receiving medical treatment are women from SSA. Concerns on HIV disclosure, stigma and discrimination were examined through a qualitative study consisting of in-depth interviews with SSA migrant women in Belgium between April 2013 and December 2014. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling if they were 18 years and older, speaking French or English and receiving healthcare in Belgium. Thematic analysis was conducted to

identify emerging themes. Forty-four of 116 patients invited to participate in the study were interviewed. Strikingly, a majority of the women refused to be interviewed. Findings show that many SSA women living with HIV/AIDS reported lack of respect for privacy, confidentiality concern, and distrust in African diaspora and anticipated stigma that could lead to discrimination. Stigma and discrimination can encourage heinous forms of human rights abuses. Public as well as private entourage is generally ill-equipped to handle stigma, discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice. Despite some progress in the struggle to reduce stigma, fundamental challenges remain to be addressed. Stigma associated with HIV/AIDS requires emphasis in future research as it remains a barrier to prevention, treatment and care.

Biography

Agnes Ebotabe Arrey holds a PhD in Social Health Sciences and is a researcher with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Research Group, Department of Public Health at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. She holds Masters in Business Administration, International Politics, Cultures and Development Studies as well as postgraduate diplomas in Entrepreneurship and New ventures and International Educating and a World Bank certificate on Reproductive Health. Previously, she studied law, worked in public and private sectors in Cameroon and Belgium. She has been an author of nine journal articles and two book chapters in review. She reviews for international peer-review scientific journals.

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