

Review of aids and stigma by gregory m. harek

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The current literature as of 1999 is reviewed regarding the stigma that attaches to people with AIDS (PWAs) and people with HIV (PWHIVs). “Stigma” refers to discrimination and prejudice directed at PWAs and PWHIVs as well as those people associated with them or caregivers for them.

This stigma has resulted in firings, evictions, and other forms of prejudice to people with AIDS and HIV. The existence of stigma has had a bad effect on the response to the AIDS crisis and could have a continuing affect on the various policies designed to assist PWAs and PWHIVs.

Surveys throughout the world and specifically in the United States have indicated a negative attitude towards PWAs and PWHIVs by a significant majority of people.

There are several possible reasons for the stigma. Many people believe PWAs and PWHIVs got the disease by their own actions and behavior. Others fear contracting the disease from any contact with PWAs and PWHIVs.

Then there is the stigma associated with any disease considered that cannot be cured followed by the fear of contracting a contagious disease. Finally is the stigma associated with diseases or conditions affecting the victims' outward appearance and capability.

The stigma of AIDS has an impact on a personal level and with society and public policy. For example, many people with AIDS or HIV do not get tested for fear of the stigma attached to the disease.

In society the negative attitude has and continues to have an effect on public policy and public health issues and legislation. However, the situation has changed over the years with education, and with continued education

discrimination and prejudice towards PWAs and PWHIVs will further decrease.

I like this article for several reasons. It is well written and organized. It is written in a style and manner which is easy to read for the average student.

There is no specialized language or information presented. Additionally there are no graphs or tables of statistics or lengthy quotations or references to other work. There is no detectible bias in the article. It is a very relevant topic today as much as it was when written. It is very thought provoking and informative regarding a variety of issues.

The issue of stigma can have a very strong affect on the individual reader, as it has had on me. Unfortunately AIDS has spread to the point where more and more people know of someone afflicted with the disease or know someone who has been directly affected by the disease.

With this increase comes the awareness of the stigma associated with PWAs and PWHIV, and the likelihood that someone we know has suffered from discrimination or prejudice.

There is an " association" effect as well, when there is a similar prejudice, discrimination or fear of people who take care of or are related to PWAs and PWHIVs. The information presented in the article cannot help but make the individual aware of the issue if he or she is not already familiar with the disease, and adds knowledge to those who are familiar with it.

Additionally, it makes the individual, and me, question whether or not I harbor any prejudice or discrimination and if so how I exhibit it. This article is

very good at making me look past myself to broader issues, as well as to look inside myself for attitudes I should question.

I particularly like the method in which the causes of stigma are presented. It is particularly helpful in examining whether or not I believe in any of the reasons or use them as an excuse. It is also helpful in realizing the fallacy of many of the reasons.

The first reason presented seems very irrelevant, as regardless of how someone contracted AIDS or any disease should have no bearing on attitude, although for many people religious belief may be a factor that cannot be easily ignored.

The second reason, fear of contracting the disease, was a personal fear of mine until I became aware of the fact that it cannot be contracted by casual contact. Common sense tells us that we are probably around PWAs and PWHIVs daily without knowing it, and there has been no cases caused by casual contact.

The third and fourth reasons are the ones that I have the most difficult time with, as I have always been uncomfortable around people with life-threatening or terminal diseases, or people who obviously show outward signs of the disease.

I believe many people have this discomfort, and probably always will, as it can be very difficult to interact with such strong issues "in the background". However, what is important is to keep the discomfort from becoming a prejudice or source of discrimination.

I really liked the article because it is hopeful. It has taken a very difficult and depressing topic but presented it a manner which gives optimism to the issue. It does this by making the reader aware of the reasons, and on reflection, realizes all of the reasons can be lessened or removed with awareness and education.

It has made me more aware of a very significant issue in society today. It has also caused me to reflect on my personal attitude and actions. It has clearly presents a thesis and evidence in an easy-to-read manner.

I like it because it stresses how common and damaging prejudice and discrimination is, and the role of education in overcoming prejudice, which is important not just for PWAs and PWHIVs but for everyone. Finally, it is an article I can use as reference to anyone who can benefit from the information or may be interested in the issue.

Works Cited

Harek, Gregory M. " AIDS and Stigma". American Behavioral Scientist, Volume 42, No. 7, April 1999. 1102-1112.