

ABSTRACT TITLE

Addressing Stigma and Discrimination to Improve HIV-related Health Services in Military Health Facilities around the Globe

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ABSTRACT BODY

Summary:

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP) works with over 50 militaries around the globe to support HIV prevention and treatment services for military members and their families. Developments in HIV treatment allow people living with HIV (PLHIV) to live long and healthy lives. Further, innovations in HIV prevention has increased the number of available prevention options. Despite these advancements, stigma and discrimination (S&D) remain persistent barriers for testing, treatment, and prevention services reaching those in need. Effective measurement and program tools are necessary to understand and eliminate the drivers and facilitators of S&D in military health facilities.

Methods:

A scientific review and input from S&D experts informed the selection of the Genberg Stigma Scale (GSS). This scale is now the S&D module that is included in the periodic HIV prevalence and behavioral risk survey for militaries.

Next, a program evaluation tool was developed to determine the type and frequency of activities that funded implementing partners (IPs) were delivering. Findings indicated the majority of IPs were not delivering multi-level rigorous interventions.

S&D experts evaluated interventions and selected a comprehensive participatory led package. It was modified for the military context and multi-level components were developed to address individual and structural level drivers of S&D. This was piloted in Guyana in 2017 and modified based on participant feedback.

Conclusion:

Findings from the GSS, program data, and contextual information helped tailor the development of comprehensive S&D reduction packages for each country. To date, we conducted 18 "training of trainers" workshops; 4 of those countries have also launched Codes of Conduct in their health facilities to inform patients of their rights and the responsibilities of healthcare workers. Several participating militaries have revised their HIV policies to allow PLHIV to join the military and deploy on peacekeeping missions. Many participants are now S&D trainers addressing stigma in military medical facilities and advocating for PLHIV. Health

care workers report feeling empowered to advocate for their patient needs through requests for additional resources and policy change to protect the rights of PLHIV.