

Advancing HIV Stigma Reduction in Rwanda: Assessing Implementation and Proposing Solutions

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Introduction

HIV-related stigma and discrimination remain significant barriers globally, impeding access to essential services for people living with HIV (PLHIV) and hindering progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

Description

This abstract presents an evaluation of the progress in implementing recommendations from the HIV Stigma Index 2.0 in Rwanda-by-Rwanda Network of People living with HIV / AIDS (RRP+), in collaboration with the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and WHO in 2024. The assessment aimed to gauge the extent of recommendation implementation using qualitative methods, including interviews and focus group discussions. A comprehensive desk review of relevant documents supplemented primary data collection conducted from January to March 2024 across various sites in Rwanda.

Lessons learned

Findings uncovered significant gaps in the dissemination and awareness of the Stigma Index report among stakeholders, hindering effective recommendation implementation. Despite challenges, some advancements were noted, such as advocacy campaigns and training initiatives led by organizations like RRP+ and government bodies like the Ministry of Health and Education. However, persistent stigma and discrimination, particularly among key populations like men who have sex with men (MSM), people who use drugs, and adolescents, underscored the need for targeted interventions.

Recommendations

To enhance recommendation implementation and reduce HIV-related stigma, several recommendations were proposed. These include the development of a comprehensive dissemination plan, establishing a coordinated steering committee for Stigma Index implementation, integrating monitoring indicators into health systems, strengthening legal protections, continuous training of healthcare providers, and finalizing ministerial instructions to combat stigma in educational institutions.