



The attitudes towards providing care for people living with HIV among healthcare workers in Poland



Filip Fijołek¹, Martyna Cholewik², Carlo Bieńkowski¹, Justyna D. Kowalska¹, Agata Skrzat-Klapaczyńska¹

¹Department of Adults' Infectious Diseases, Medical University of Warsaw, Hospital for Infectious Diseases, 7th Ward, Warsaw, Poland
²Faculty of Medicine, Medical University of Warsaw, Poland

Introduction

- People living with HIV continue to face stigma and discrimination.
- The role of healthcare workers (HCWs) in fighting stigmatization, especially self-stigmatization, remains a crucial component.
- **The aim of the study was to measure HIV knowledge and attitudes in various healthcare settings in Europe and Central Asia.**

Materials and methods

- A cross-sectional survey study was designed by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European AIDS Clinical Society.
- Data were collected anonymously between September 15th and November 30th 2023.
- Responses from Poland were analyzed separately and stratified by profession and time of work.
- Chi-Square Test and Fisher's Exact Test were used in statistical analysis.

Results

Studied group: 134 participants
Median age: 41

- Most of participants were female (70.90%), physicians (57.89%), working for more than 10 years (73.85%) and worked in a hospital (66.17%).
- Most of respondents did not take care of people living with HIV in the year before implementing the survey (56.65%).
- Majority of participants presented up to date knowledge and assessment of risk of HIV transmission along with acceptance and willingness to provide services.

Characteristic	All n/N (%)	Physicians n/N (%)	Other HCWs n/N (%)	Years in healthcare <10, n/N (%)	Years in healthcare >10, n/N (%)
Agreed that people living with HIV who have an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus sexually	89/133 (66.92)	61/77 (79.22)	28/56 (50.00)	25/34 (73.53)	62/96 (64.58)
		P<0.001		P=0.341	
Agreed that using post-exposure prophylaxis prevents the virus from spreading	106/133 (79.70)	68/77 (88.31)	38/56 (67.86)	29/34 (85.29)	75/96 (78.13)
		P=0.004		P=0.369	
Agreed that using pre-exposure prophylaxis prevents the virus from spreading	81/130 (62.31)	59/75 (78.67)	22/55 (40.00)	22/33 (66.67)	56/94 (59.57)
		P<0.001		P=0.471	
Not worried about touching the clothing of a person living with HIV	127/128 (99.22)	74/74 (100.00)	53/54 (98.15)	33/33 (100.00)	91/92 (98.91)
		P=0.422		P=1	
Not worried about dressing the wounds of a person living with HIV	82/114 (71.93)	55/71 (77.46)	27/43 (62.79)	14/27 (51.85)	67/84 (79.76)
		P=0.091		P=0.005	
Not worried about drawing blood from a person living with HIV	84/117 (71.79)	56/69 (81.16)	28/48 (58.33)	14/28 (50.00)	67/86 (77.91)
		P=0.007		P=0.005	
Not worried about taking the temperature of a person living with HIV	122/123 (99.19)	74/74 (100.00)	48/49 (97.96)	29/29 (100.00)	90/91 (98.90)
		P=0.398		P=1	
Avoided physical contact when providing care or services for a person living with HIV	8/109 (7.34)	2/67 (2.99)	6/42 (14.29)	2/25 (8.00)	7/81 (8.64)
		P=0.028		P=0.920	
Used double gloves when providing care or services for a person living with HIV	37/113 (32.74)	14/71 (19.72)	23/42 (54.76)	7/25 (28.00)	28/85 (32.94)
		P<0.001		P=0.641	
Wore gloves during all aspects of the patient's care when providing care or services for a person living with HIV	59/110 (53.64)	33/69 (47.83)	26/41 (63.41)	10/24 (41.67)	48/83 (57.83)
		P=0.112		P=0.162	
Used any special infection-control measures with people living with HIV that are not used with other patients	86/113 (76.11)	51/69 (73.91)	35/44 (79.55)	22/25 (88.00)	62/85 (72.94)
		P=0.494		P=0.119	
Observed no unwillingness to take care of people living with HIV in their workplace in the past 12 months	70/110 (63.64)	47/65 (72.31)	23/45 (51.11)	14/27 (51.85)	56/80 (70.00)
		P=0.023		P=0.086	
Observed no poorer quality of care provided to a person living with HIV in their workplace in the past 12 months	84/111 (75.66)	55/66 (83.33)	29/45 (64.44)	22/27 (81.48)	60/81 (74.07)
		P=0.023		P=0.436	
Observed no discriminatory remarks or talking badly about people living with HIV in their workplace in the past 12 months	69/118 (58.47)	45/69 (65.22)	24/49 (49.98)	15/29 (51.72)	51/86 (59.30)
		P=0.078		P=0.475	
Observed no disclosure of a person's HIV status without their consent in their workplace in the past 12 months	97/117 (82.91)	58/69 (84.06)	39/48 (81.25)	21/29 (72.41)	73/85 (85.88)
		P=0.691		P=0.100	
Agreed that it is not acceptable in their facility to test a patient for HIV without their knowledge	75/131 (57.25)	45/76 (59.21)	30/55 (54.55)	16/34 (47.06)	59/94 (62.77)
		P=0.594		P=0.111	
Agreed that they will get in trouble at work if they discriminate against people living with HIV	75/133 (56.39)	39/77 (50.65)	36/56 (64.29)	20/34 (58.82)	53/95 (55.79)
		P=0.117		P=0.715	
Agreed that their facility has guidelines to protect people living with HIV from discrimination	16/133 (12.03)	9/77 (11.69)	7/56 (12.50)	3/34 (8.82)	13/96 (13.54)
		P=0.887		P=0.472	
Agreed that there are standardized procedures in their health facility that reduce their risk of acquiring HIV	119/133 (89.47)	69/77 (89.61)	50/56 (89.29)	31/34 (91.18)	85/96 (88.54)
		P=0.951		P=0.670	
Agreed that their health facility has a Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) protocol in case of needlestick injury	122/133 (91.73)	72/77 (93.51)	50/56 (89.29)	32/34 (94.12)	87/96 (90.63)
		P=0.382		P=0.529	
Agreed that their facility has a policy for scheduling people living with HIV on the end of an operating/procedure list	12/133 (9.02)	8/77 (10.39)	4/56 (7.14)	2/34 (5.88)	8/96 (8.33)
		P=0.519		P=0.645	
Agreed that in their facility there are guidelines recommending wearing double gloves when caring for people living with HIV	17/133 (12.78)	6/77 (7.79)	11/56 (19.64)	5/34 (14.71)	11/96 (11.46)
		P=0.043		P=0.620	
Believed that people living with HIV should be allowed to have a fulfilling sexual life	118/132 (89.39)	71/77 (92.21)	47/55 (85.45)	30/34 (88.24)	85/95 (89.47)
		P=0.214		P=0.842	
Believed that women living with HIV should be allowed to have babies if they wish	114/132 (86.36)	71/77 (92.21)	43/55 (78.18)	30/34 (88.24)	81/95 (85.26)
		P=0.021		P=0.668	
Believed that most people living with HIV have had too many sexual partners	16/132 (12.12)	9/77 (11.69)	7/55 (12.73)	1/34 (2.94)	15/95 (15.79)
		P=0.856		P=0.051	
Believed that people acquire HIV because they engage in irresponsible behaviors	45/132 (34.09)	26/77 (33.77)	19/55 (34.55)	8/34 (23.53)	35/95 (36.84)
		P=0.925		P=0.158	
Believed that HIV is punishment for bad behavior	0/132 (0.00)	0/77 (0.00)	0/55 (0.00)	0/34 (0.00)	0/95 (0.00)
		P=1		P=1	
Believed that people living with HIV should feel ashamed of themselves	0/132 (0.00)	0/77 (0.00)	0/55 (0.00)	0/34 (0.00)	0/95 (0.00)
		P=1		P=1	
Believed that most people living with HIV do not care if they infect other people	7/132 (5.30)	3/77 (3.90)	4/55 (7.27)	1/34 (2.94)	6/95 (6.32)
		P=0.393		P=0.456	
Believed that people living with HIV with detectable viral loads should not be participating in sexual activity	33/132 (25.00)	16/77 (20.78)	17/55 (30.91)	8/34 (25.53)	25/95 (26.32)
		P=0.185		P=0.749	
Preferred not to provide care or services to people who inject prohibited drugs	19/133 (14.29)	11/77 (14.29)	8/56 (14.29)	6/34 (17.65)	12/96 (12.50)
		P=1		P=0.455	
Preferred not to provide care or services to men who have sex with men	3/133 (2.26)	3/77 (3.90)	0/56 (0.00)	0/34 (0.00)	3/96 (3.13)
		P=0.263		P=0.567	
Preferred not to provide care or services to sex workers	5/133 (3.76)	3/77 (3.90)	2/56 (3.57)	0/34 (0.00)	4/96 (4.17)
		P=0.922		P=0.572	
Preferred not to provide care or services to transgender men and women	4/102 (3.92)	3/57 (5.26)	1/45 (2.22)	0/23 (0.00)	4/75 (5.33)
		P=0.432		P=0.570	

- HCWs working for over 10 years were less worried about dressing wounds (p=0.005) and drawing blood (p=0.005) from people living with HIV.
- Physicians were more likely to agree that post-exposure prophylaxis (p=0.004) and pre-exposure prophylaxis (p<0.001) prevent the spread of the virus, that people living with HIV who have an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus through sexual intercourse (p<0.001) and that women living with HIV can have children (p=0.021).
- Physicians were less likely to be worried if they drew blood from a person living with HIV (p=0.007).
- Other HCWs were more likely to avoid physical contact (p=0.028) and wear double gloves (p<0.001) when interacting with a person living with HIV.
- Other HCWs were more likely to observe a reluctance (p=0.023) to take care of people living with HIV in their workplace.

Conclusions

- Majority of Polish HCWs who responded the survey presented willingness to support and provide services for people living with HIV and/or at risk of HIV.
- However, there is still space for improvement in education, especially among non-doctors working in healthcare settings.