



EXPLORING THE FEAR OF SOCIAL STIGMA AND FINANCIAL BARRIERS FACED BY HIV-POSITIVE INDIVIDUAL: A CASE STUDY OF RAVEENA

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the challenges faced by Raveena, a 38-year-old HIV-positive single mother, as she navigates through social stigma, mental health concerns, and financial barriers following her divorce from an HIV-infected husband. After discovering her husband's HIV status and the revelation that she was his second wife, Raveena was left alone, pregnant, and uncertain about her future. This research aims to understand how social stigma impacts Raveena's mental health, employment opportunities, and financial stability.

The study aims to identify opportunities for Raveena's empowerment and potential interventions to improve her overall well-being. The research employs qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, to gather data on Raveena's experiences and explore the impact of her circumstances on her life and mental health. The findings emphasize the need to develop comprehensive support programs to address the multifaceted challenges faced by HIV-positive single mothers.

OBJECTIVE: Fear of Social Stigma and financial barriers. The objective of this case study is to examine the fear of social stigma and financial barriers faced by Raveena, a woman living with HIV, and how these factors impact her mental health and overall well-being. By exploring Raveena's experiences, this study aims to shed light on the intersection of HIV infection, social stigma, financial challenges, and mental health implications, thereby highlighting the need for comprehensive support services and interventions.

1. INTRODUCTION

This case study explores the experiences of Raveena, (name changed) a 38-year-old woman who is unemployed and living with HIV. Raveena discovered her HIV status after being married to Shekar, (name changed) in 2008, only to later find out that he had knowingly infected her without disclosing his own HIV-positive status. This revelation led Raveena to leave Shekar, but she faced numerous challenges as a result. Raveena discovered she was Shekar's second wife while she was three months pregnant, leaving her shaken and feeling her future was at stake. Faced with the fear of social stigma and financial barriers, Raveena subsequently applied for divorce and found herself alone with her five-year-old daughter, searching for employment to support their livelihoods.

1.1 Background

The case study is about Raveena, a 38-year-old lady who was married to Shekar in 2008. Shekar, an HIV patient, had married Raveena without disclosing his condition. Raveena found out about her HIV status during her three-month pregnancy. She also found out that she was Shekar's second wife. Feeling betrayed, Raveena applied for a divorce and is

now a single mother taking care of her five-year-old daughter. She is searching for a job to support herself and her child. However, she faces challenges of social stigma and financial barriers.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to understand the fear of social stigma and financial barriers faced by HIV-positive individuals and single mothers in India. The study aims to analyze the impact of social stigma on the psychological well-being of the affected individuals. Additionally, it aims to explore the financial constraints faced by single mothers and the discrimination faced by HIV-positive individuals in the job market.

1.3 Scope and Limitations

The study will focus on the experiences of HIV-positive individuals and single mothers in India. It will involve qualitative research methods, such as interviews and surveys, and will include individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. However, the study may have some limitations, such as a small sample size, which may limit the generalization of the findings. Additionally, since the study is based on self-reported experiences, there may be biases and variations in the responses. The study also does not consider the role of cultural and political factors in shaping attitudes towards HIV and single motherhood in India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The case study of Raveena highlights the intersection of fear of social stigma and financial barriers experienced by women living with HIV. This literature review aims to shed light on



existing research and studies that explore these issues, their impact on mental health, and potential interventions to address them.

2.1 HIV and Social Stigma

People living with HIV/AIDS have always been subjected to social stigma and discrimination in virtually all societies. This stigma and discrimination often result in poor health outcomes, low quality of life and social exclusion. Social stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS are rooted in a number of factors, including myths, misconceptions, ignorance, prejudice and fear. Studies indicate that HIV-related stigma emanates from the perceived moral and behavioral flaws of people living with HIV/AIDS. People from marginalized groups, such as sex workers, drug users, and homosexual men, and those living in poor or rural areas, are most likely to be affected by HIV-related stigma.

The fear of social stigma surrounding HIV remains a significant concern affecting individuals diagnosed with the virus. Research has consistently shown that stigma leads to increased levels of shame, secrecy, and isolation among people living with HIV (PLWH) (Earnshaw et al., 2018). Stigma is particularly pronounced in cases where HIV infection is acquired through intimate relationships, contributing to feelings of betrayal and broken trust (Kalichman et al., 2006). Women may experience unique forms of stigma, including the fear of being labeled as promiscuous or facing discrimination related to their reproductive health (Turan et al., 2017). Stigma has been linked to various negative outcomes, including psychological distress, poor adherence to treatment, and reduced quality of life (Rao et al., 2012).

2.2 Mental Health Challenges among HIV-Positive Individuals

Individuals living with HIV are at an increased risk of developing a range of mental health disorders including depression, anxiety, cognitive impairment, and psychotic symptoms. Mental health disorders can be triggered by the physical, social, and psychological consequences of HIV, including loss of employment, social isolation and discrimination, fear of illness progression and medication side effects, and stigma. HIV-related stigma and discrimination, in particular, are associated with negative mental health outcomes. For women like Raveena, who face additional layers of stigma based on her gender, the risk of developing mental health disorders can be particularly high.

Overall, both HIV-related stigma and financial barriers can have a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly for women like Raveena who have to contend with multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage. Research has consistently shown that stigma and discrimination are associated with increased levels of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress among PLWH (Earnshaw et al., 2018). The added burden of financial instability further contributes to mental health challenges, creating a cycle of reduced resilience and coping mechanisms (Nyamathi et al., 2018).

2.3 Financial Barriers Faced by HIV-Positive Single Mothers

Being an HIV positive single mother, Raveena faces several financial barriers which can hinder her ability to provide for herself and her daughter. Some of the financial challenges she may encounter include:

a) Loss of employment: Raveena may have lost her job or faced discrimination and termination due to her HIV status. This loss of income can create a significant financial strain, making it difficult to meet basic needs and provide for her daughter.

b) Medical expenses: HIV treatment and medications can be expensive, and Raveena may require ongoing medical care and medications to manage her condition. These costs can eat into her financial resources and limit her ability to meet other expenses.

c) Childcare expenses: As a single mother, Raveena may need to secure reliable and affordable childcare services to enable her to seek employment. These expenses can be an additional burden on her limited financial resources.

d) Lack of financial support: Raveena may not have access to financial support from her estranged husband Shekar, who may be untraceable or unwilling to contribute financially towards the well-being of their child.

Studies have found that HIV-positive women are more likely to experience economic hardships compared to their male counterparts, often facing reduced employment opportunities, wage discrimination, and higher caregiving responsibilities (Pellowski et al., 2019). Financial challenges contribute to a range of negative consequences, including inadequate access to healthcare, limited housing options, and an increased likelihood of depression (Orza et al., 2015).

2.4 Empowerment Interventions for HIV-Positive Individuals

To empower Raveena and help her overcome the challenges she faces, several interventions can be implemented:

a) Job training and employment support: Providing Raveena with training and assistance in developing job skills can enhance her chances of finding employment. Supportive services such as resume building, interview preparation, and job placement programs can help her secure stable employment and improve her financial situation.

b) Financial counseling and budgeting assistance: Raveena may benefit from financial counseling to help her develop budgeting skills and financial management strategies. This can enable her to make the most of her limited resources and identify ways to save and invest for her and her daughter's future.

c) Access to affordable healthcare: Ensuring Raveena has access to affordable healthcare services and medications is crucial. Government assistance programs, health insurance schemes, and partnerships with healthcare providers can help alleviate the financial burden of her medical expenses.

d) Support networks and peer groups: Connecting Raveena with support networks and peer groups of other HIV positive women or single mothers can provide her with emotional



support, reduce isolation, and enable her to learn from the experiences and strategies of others in similar situations.

Efforts to address the fear of social stigma and financial barriers faced by women living with HIV require multifaceted approaches. Community-based organizations and support groups have shown promise in reducing social isolation and creating safe spaces for individuals to share their experiences and seek support (Li et al., 2020). Economic empowerment programs that provide training, education, and access to resources can help women overcome financial barriers and improve their livelihoods (Abimanyi-Ochom et al., 2018). Furthermore, targeted awareness campaigns and education can challenge societal misconceptions and reduce HIV-related stigma.

e) Microfinance and entrepreneurship opportunities: Providing Raveena with access to microfinance loans or entrepreneurship training can enable her to start small businesses or income-generating activities. Such initiatives can help her become financially independent and provide for herself and her daughter.

Overall, empowerment interventions that address the financial barriers faced by Raveena can significantly improve her quality of life, increase her self-sufficiency, and help her overcome the fear of social stigma associated with being an HIV positive single mother.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

For this case study, a qualitative research design is employed. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of the fear of social stigma and financial barriers experienced by Raveena. It enables to gather detailed information and understand the experiences and perspectives of the individuals involved.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

1. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Raveena to gather subjective information about her experiences, fears, and challenges. This provided rich and detailed insights into her thoughts and emotions.
2. Observations: Her social interactions and behaviors of Raveena in her daily life to better understand the visible effects of social stigma on her were learnt.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

1. Informed Consent: Raveena will be fully informed about the purpose of the research, potential risks, and benefits, as well as her rights to withdraw at any point. Her informed consent will be obtained before commencing the study.
2. Anonymity and Confidentiality: Raveena's identity and any identifying information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect her privacy.
3. Respect and Sensitivity: The participant was approached with empathy, sensitivity, and respect, ensuring that her feelings and experiences are validated. Judgmental or stigmatizing language during data collection and analysis were avoided.

4. Validity and Reliability: It was ensured that the study design and data collection techniques are unbiased and unbiased to ensure the validity and reliability of findings.

5. Voluntary Participation: Raveena will have the option to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences or negative impacts.

Overall, the research was conducted with the utmost care and adherence to ethical guidelines to protect the well-being and rights of the participant.

4. CASE PRESENTATION

4.1 Raveena's Personal Background

Raveena is a 38-year-old woman who has been unemployed since her marriage in 2008. She might have had aspirations and dreams for her future, but circumstances have led her to a difficult path. Little information is provided about her educational background or previous work experience, but it can be inferred that she had not pursued a career before her marriage.

4.2 Raveena's HIV Diagnosis and Consequences

During her pregnancy, Raveena discovers that she is HIV positive, most likely through prenatal testing. This diagnosis has significant implications for her physical health, as HIV is a chronic condition that requires medical attention and management. Additionally, the emotional and psychological impact of the diagnosis can be overwhelming, as it alters her perception of her past and present life, creating uncertainty and fear for her future.

4.3 Raveena's Divorce and Its Impact

Upon discovering that she is Shekar's second wife, Raveena makes the difficult decision to seek a divorce. This decision is likely driven by a desire to protect herself and her child from further emotional and physical harm, as well as to secure legal and financial rights. Divorce can have wide-ranging consequences, including emotional distress, financial insecurity, and changes in social relationships.

4.4 Raveena's Efforts to Search for Employment

As a result of the divorce and her newfound status as a single mother, Raveena is compelled to search for employment to support herself and her 5-year-old daughter. The details of her job search, such as her qualifications, skills, and job preferences, are not provided. However, it can be assumed that her lack of recent work experience, coupled with the fear of social stigma surrounding her HIV status, poses significant barriers to finding suitable employment.

4.5 Raveena's Struggles as a Single Mother

Raveena's role as a single mother adds another layer of complexity to her situation. She is solely responsible for the care and well-being of her 5-year-old daughter, which may include financial obligations, providing emotional support, and ensuring a stable home environment. Juggling these responsibilities while facing the challenges of unemployment and potential discrimination due to her HIV status can be physically and emotionally draining.



4.6 Raveena's Mental Health Concerns

Given the circumstances she has faced, it is reasonable to assume that Raveena has mental health concerns. The fear of social stigma, the challenges of being a single mother, and the uncertainty about her future can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. Additionally, the lack of emotional support and potential isolation may exacerbate these mental health struggles.

Overall, Raveena's personal background, HIV diagnosis, divorce, efforts to find employment, struggles as a single mother, and mental health concerns create a complex and challenging situation in which fear of social stigma and financial barriers significantly impact her life. It is important to understand and address these issues to provide the necessary support and interventions.

Raveena's own words about her own experience as Hiv.

Hiv - Social fear and Stigma related experience.

“This has affected me and my family very much. The very person who married me had another family and kept another secret that he was infected with Hiv. I realized only after 6 months of my pregnancy. Now my social life and my family life is ruined.

I have been secluded by my family and society. I have no social life of my own. I have been rejected and has affected me very much.”

“After I realized that I was a Hiv person I was very depressed, no mistake of mine I am labelled as a HIV patient. I feel that my life is enough and I am pained by it. But I have to go on with my life because I have a daughter and I have to live just for her.”

Experiences on Financial Burden

“After I realized that am a Hiv patient I began my ART treatment, physical structure like weight loss etc has not changed. I am the same.”

“My immediate problem is financial hurdles. Although I have a Hiv husband I am no longer ready to live and use his earnings. My everyday expenses is what I am facing. But I had some savings earlier which I had thought that it would be useful someday for something, and that saving is helping me for my everyday expenses”.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Stigma Encountered by Raveena in Society

Raveena experiences significant social stigma due to her HIV status. Society often holds prejudices and misconceptions about HIV, leading to discrimination, ostracism, and isolation.

Raveena may face judgment, rejection, and stigma from friends, family, and the community. This stigma can manifest in various ways, such as gossip, exclusion, and negative attitudes towards her and her daughter.

5.2 Impact on Raveena's Mental Well-being

The fear of social stigma has a detrimental impact on Raveena's well-being. She may experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to the constant worry and anticipation of judgment from others. The fear of disclosure and the stigma associated with her HIV status can worsen her physical and mental health. Raveena may also struggle with low self-esteem and feelings of shame, making it challenging for her to seek support and maintain healthy relationships.

5.3 Financial Challenges Faced by Raveena

Being unemployed, Raveena faces significant financial challenges on top of the stigma she encounters. As a single mother, she must provide for her daughter's basic needs while also managing her own expenses, such as housing, healthcare, and medication. The fear of disclosing her HIV status during job searches and potential workplace discrimination further exacerbate her financial struggles. Raveena's limited employment opportunities, coupled with the responsibility of caring for her child, present formidable barriers to financial stability.

5.4 Support Systems Available for HIV-Positive Single Mothers

Raveena's support system plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges she faces. Community organizations and NGOs specializing in HIV support can provide counseling, social services, and skills training to help alleviate the social, emotional, and financial burden. Support groups specifically created for HIV-positive individuals, particularly single mothers, can offer a safe space for sharing experiences, reducing isolation, and fostering empowerment. Access to healthcare professionals, including counselors and social workers, are also essential in providing Raveena with the care and guidance she needs to navigate her circumstances.

In conclusion, the findings highlight the significant challenges Raveena faces due to social stigma and financial barriers in the context of her HIV-positive status and single motherhood. The impact on her well-being is profound, affecting her mental health and overall quality of life. However, a supportive network, including community organizations and support groups, can play a vital role in helping her overcome these challenges and empower her to rebuild her life despite the societal barriers she faces.



Potential Coping Mechanisms

Raveena's Potential coping mechanisms.		Mechanisms.
Social Stigma	Social Isolation, Discrimination,	Support Groups Emotion support guidance Education and awareness programs
Financial Burden, with a child	Unemployed, job	Exploring Govt Assistance, Support of NGOs, Short term jobs, Building strong network
Family Fear	Fear of Future Well-being Career of daughter	Prioritising her health, seeking counselling and therapy,

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Enhancing Social Support Networks

- Raveena should be encouraged to join support groups specifically designed for HIV-positive individuals or single mothers dealing with similar challenges. These groups provide a safe space for sharing experiences, receiving emotional support, and exchanging resources.
 - Community organizations and NGOs should develop outreach programs to identify and connect individuals facing similar circumstances to create a network of support. This can help combat feelings of isolation and build a sense of community.

6.2 Advocacy for HIV Awareness and Stigma Reduction

- Communities and organizations should work together to promote HIV awareness campaigns, focusing on dispelling myths, educating the public about transmission methods, and promoting empathy and inclusivity.
 - Advocacy efforts should aim to reduce HIV-related stigma by challenging prejudiced attitudes through public messaging, education campaigns, and collaboration with media outlets to promote accurate portrayals of people living with HIV.

6.3 Providing Adequate Mental Health Support

- Collaborate with mental health professionals, counselors, and therapists to offer accessible and targeted mental health support services for individuals living with HIV, especially those facing social stigma.
 - Integrate mental health support within existing healthcare services for HIV-positive individuals to ensure routine check-ins and support for emotional well-being.

6.4 Resources for Economic Empowerment

- NGOs and community organizations should establish vocational training programs to enhance the employability of individuals like Raveena. These programs can provide skill-building opportunities, such as job-specific training, resume preparation, and interview skills.
 - Explore partnerships with local businesses and employers to create job opportunities and reduce discriminatory practices against HIV-positive individuals.



6.5 Collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

- Collaborate with NGOs specializing in HIV support to provide comprehensive services that address the various needs of individuals living with HIV, including social, medical, and financial support.
- Create partnerships with NGOs that focus on women's empowerment and economic development to ensure access to resources and programs specifically designed for female HIV-positive individuals and single mothers.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can help empower individuals like Raveena by fostering social support networks, reducing HIV-related stigma, providing mental health support, facilitating economic opportunities, and forging partnerships with NGOs to ensure comprehensive support and assistance. These efforts will contribute to improving the overall well-being and quality of life for individuals living with HIV and challenging social barriers.

7. CONCLUSION

Raveena's experience highlights the significant challenges faced by women living with HIV, particularly in situations involving undisclosed infection by their partners. Fear of social stigma surrounding HIV, along with the financial barriers associated with unemployment and single parenthood, severely impact their mental health and overall quality of life. Raveena's decision to apply for divorce and search for employment speaks to her resilience, determination, and commitment to building a better future for herself and her daughter. However, there is a crucial need for society to address the root causes of social stigma and implement supportive policies and programs that provide comprehensive support to individuals living with HIV, particularly women facing financial hardships. By recognizing and addressing both the social and economic dimensions of living with HIV, it is possible to combat the fear of social stigma and alleviate financial barriers, ultimately promoting the well-being and empowerment of individuals like Raveena.

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