

Use of Film to Address HIV-related Stigma and Discrimination in the Namibian Military

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Abstract:

Background and Implementation Approach:

Addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination among the Namibian military is of critical importance. Stigma is cited as an important barrier to accessing on-base HIV counseling and testing and care and treatment services. To implement the upcoming anti-discrimination policy and generate demand for on-base services, the Ministry of Defense/Namibian Defense Force (MOD/NDF) will address stigma through commander training, peer education, and the film, "Remember Eliphaz 3" (RE3). In this abstract, results of formative research which informed the film's story line and script are provided.

Analysis Design and Methods:

Qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews and focus groups among NDF leadership, mid-level management, and soldiers. The script was pretested during auditions and cast rehearsals with special attention to stigma and discrimination messaging.

Results:

From conscription at 18 to retirement at 60, most soldiers are posted on bases far from home. Interviewees stated, "The military is your bread, butter, and family" and "it is very important in the military to be accepted in your group." Soldiers expressed concerns with social stigma, fearing others will learn their positive status and that as a result, they would suffer rejection, isolation, and gossip. Stigma appears to impede willingness to seek testing, treatment and support. "Seeking treatment increases the chances that others will find out." The fear of stigma may lead soldiers to delay seeking testing and treatment. Some soldiers believed that those who test positive would be subject to discrimination on the job and be removed from duties such as driving an official vehicle, despite their fitness for the task. In the military workplace, several national and international policies contribute to stigma and discrimination. Many countries are not willing to host foreign HIV- positive military staff members for advanced training. Namibian military personnel living with HIV are excluded from participating in United Nations foreign missions. These missions include extra allowances and increased chance of promotion.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

From this formative research, scenes were developed and woven throughout "RE3" which addresses the plausible causes and manifestations of stigma and discrimination in the military. Eliphaz, a good, self-disciplined soldier, who is also HIV-positive, bravely models positive living. He supports a friend who struggles to reduce risk behaviors and debates seeking HIV counseling and testing. Gossipers' behavior is portrayed as harmful to individuals and unit cohesion. Practical skills to overcome social stigma are modeled. Stigma in the workplace is addressed at various levels in the chain of command. "RE3" demonstrates that film can be used to address stigma and discrimination in the military.

Track/Category (Complete): F7.Interventions to address HIV stigma and discrimination

Keyword (Complete): stigma ; military ; film

Implementation Area (Complete):

Implementation Areas: Prevention with High Risk Groups