



AIDSVu Adds Visualized Data on Stigma

The JHU Stigma Dashboard tracks data on sexual behavior stigma that affects HIV outcomes and health equity.

June 13, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

Aiming to track and reduce the [stigmas](#) that act as a barrier to HIV prevention, treatment and care—as well as a hindrance to better overall health outcomes—the interactive HIV data tool AIDSVu recently added the Stigma Dashboard to its features. Currently, the dashboard tracks sexual behavior stigma in [Georgia](#), [New York](#) and [Maryland](#). Specifically, it includes data on men who have sex with men in those states. Additional data and geographic areas will be incorporated in future phases.

Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health researchers Amrita Rao, PhD, and Stefan Baral, MD, created the [Stigma Dashboard](#) to track progress to eliminating stigmas across different geographic regions.

Stigma comes in many forms and can negatively affect how people living with HIV interact with medical professionals and adhere to HIV treatment; it can also deter HIV-negative individuals from accessing prevention tools, such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). What's more, there many other types of stigma—including racism, homophobia and transphobia—can affect a person's well-being and engagement in care.

"Stigma is a central underpinning as to why somebody is at risk for being homeless, and why a gay man may be at risk for HIV, and beyond," Baral [told AIDSVu](#). "It's like you can follow this pathway along why some folks have worse addictions, why some folks have more dependencies, and so on—it's that stigmas have manifested in different ways."

He continued: "We are trying to [measure] stigma in a very nuanced way—through anticipated stigma, perceptions of stigma, enacted stigma, intersectional stigmas and beyond. We want to understand the drivers that worsen health outcomes among certain communities structurally and then provide insights into how to respond to them."

Researchers used qualitative survey data from cisgender gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men [throughout the United States](#) to provide information on stigma from family, anticipated health care stigma and general social stigma.

For example, 14% of New York men who answered the survey have felt afraid to attend health care appointments because of their sexuality. In Georgia, a state with [a heavy burden of HIV](#), 19% of men avoided health care services for the same reason.

Rao and Baral hope the dashboard will provide health departments, local organizations and advocates with a common language to address stigma.

Researchers will continue collecting data by conducting needs assessments and focus group discussions to inform the development of the dashboard. They also plan to include data on additional states with high HIV prevalence.

In addition, they aim to use the input to develop interventions to mitigate the impacts of stigma on HIV risk and promote health equity.

“The more we can specify, measure and understand it, the better we can get at addressing the underlying drivers of inequities and thus trying to work towards increasing equity,” Baral said.

For more about other stigma elimination efforts, [click here](#) to watch Elton John launch a campaign to fight LGBTQ stigma and raise funds for HIV services. The fundraising effort is part of the Pride campaign “Speak Up Sing Out” by the Elton John AIDS Foundation. The campaign invites folks to post an Instagram reels of themselves singing a verse of his classic “Your Song” and name-checking a person who has inspired them to be their authentic self.

For more, click [#Stigma](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Does Your Doctor Need to Take Stigmavir to Treat HIV Stigma?](#)” “[\\$950K Grant to Study the Link Between Stigma, Meth, HIV and Latino Men](#)” and “[Kudos for Saying That.](#)”