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Unpacking the dynamics of double stigma: how the HIV-TB co-epidemic alters TB stigma and its management among healthcare workers

CITATION

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ABSTRACT

Background: HIV and tuberculosis (TB) are intricably interlinked in South Africa. The social aspects of this co-epidemic remain relatively unexplored. More specifically, no research has quantitatively explored the double stigma associated with HIV and TB in this context, and more specifically the impact of the co-epidemic on [1] the stigmatisation of TB and [2] the TB stigma management strategy of covering (i.e. the use of TB as a cover for having HIV). The current study aims to address this research gap by disentangling the complex mechanisms related to HIVTB stigma.

Methods: Using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), data of 882 health care workers (HCWs) in the Free State province, South Africa, are analysed to investigate the link between the stigmatization of HIV and TB and the stigma management by those affected. The current study focuses on health care workers (HCWs), as both TB and HIV have a severe impact on this professional group.

Results: The results demonstrate that the perceived link between the epidemics is significantly associated with double HIV-TB stigmatization. Furthermore, the link between the illnesses and the double stigma are driving the stigmatization of TB. Finally, the link between HIV and TB as well as the stigmatization of both diseases by colleagues are associated with an increased use of covering as a stigma management strategy.

Conclusions: This is the first quantitative study disentangling the mediating role of double stigma in the context of the co-epidemic as well as the impact of the co-epidemic on the social connotations of TB. The results stress the need for an integrated approach in the fight against HIV and TB recognizing the intertwined nature of the co-epidemic, not only in medical-clinical terms, but also in its social consequences.

Trial registration: South African National Clinical Trials Register, registration ID: DOH-27-1115-5204. Prospectively registered on 26 August 2015.

Keywords: Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, co-epidemic, stigma, double stigma, health care workers, structural equation modelling, South Africa