DISCRIMINATION FACED BY HIV POSITIVE FEMALES
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ABSTRACT
There are biological, social, cultural, legal, political and economic factors that make women more prone to stigma, discrimination and ostracism related to HIV/AIDS. The aim of this study was to evaluate the level of discrimination faced by HIV positive females. 83 HIV positive female cases were prospectively studied to know the level of discrimination by spouse, other family members, employers and society. All were subjected to a questionnaire designed for the purpose 35 (42 per cent) out of 83 females reported some form of discrimination. Out of these, 15 (43 per cent) were discriminated by in laws, 8(23 per cent) by husbands, 5 (14 per cent) by doctors 3(90 per cent) by family members, 2(6 per cent) by employers and 2(6 per cent) were discriminated by society. Maximum discrimination faced by HIV positive women were from their in laws. HIV positive females were highlighted as culprits who bring infection to the family and were forced to leave their homes.

Hence a separate platform and support system is the need of the time to address issues related to gender discrimination in HIV infected.

KEY WORDS
HIV, Females, Discrimination

INTRODUCTION
The HIV epidemic continues to shift towards women and young people and it has been estimated that 39 per cent of adults living HIV/AIDS in India as to the end of 2002 were women.

The rising global burden of AIDS in women can ultimately be attributed in large measure to the disadvantage ours social position of women throughout most of the world. Moreover, they are prevented from learning about or using safer sex techniques. Thus both here and abroad, AIDS in women is a separate epidemic and approaches to its control need to be gender specific.

AIMS OF STUDY
To evaluate the level of discrimination faced by HIV positive females.

MATERIALS & METHODS
83 HIV positive female cases were prospectively studied to know the level of discrimination faced by them. An indepth interview was taken by the doctor and social worker inquiring their acceptance in family and society after disclosure of HIV status. They were also asked about the doctor's attitude while giving treatment and whether their employers allowed them to continue their service on knowing their HIV status.

RESULTS:

Table 1
Discrimination Faced by HIV Positive Females
(N=83)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrimination faced/or not</th>
<th>by Whom</th>
<th>No. of Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discerned</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By in laws</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By husband</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>14 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By doctor</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>9 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By employer</td>
<td>02*</td>
<td>6 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Society</td>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 83 (100%)

* 5 females were employed, out of which 2 faced discrimination.

42 per cent females were discriminated by someone or other. Maximum discrimination was faced from in laws.

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DISCRIMINATION BY IN LAWS (18/35) CASES

HIV positive females were highlighted as a culprit who brings infection to family and they were forced to leave their homes especially widows. A middle aged widow quoted:

"I was sent out of my in laws house with my 2 year old daughter without any money or share of property. Moreover I was not allowed to mix with children or grandchildren and was treated as untouchables".

DISCRIMINATION BY HUSBAND (8/35 CASES)

It was reported in 8 cases. Interestingly out of these 6 cases acquired it by blood transfusion and 2 by sexual transmission (from husband). A 32 year old female reported:

"My husband refuses to talk to me, does not even look at me since I tested positive".

DISCRIMINATION BY DOCTOR (5/35 CASES)

All females were tested without counseling and consent because husbands were positive or because of pregnancy.

If pregnant, they were refused any services and referred to general hospital.

Case Study

25 year female pregnant

10:00 am Emergency Caesarean was done in private nursing home and blood sample collected for HIV testing

12:00 noon Blood sample turned out to be HIV positive.

At 2:00 pm Discharged and referred to general hospital with a new born baby.

Pre or post test counseling was not offered. Patient/Husband or relatives had no knowledge regarding HIV positivity.

DISCRIMINATION BY EMPLOYER (2/35 CASES)

Case Study 1:

A 28 year old educated female working as a nurse reported:

"My employer came to know about my HIV positive status from the pathologist who was his friend. He fired me from the job on the very same day".

Case Study 2:

Driver from nationalized bank died of AIDS. Wife was tested without consent and found to be HIV positive and report was not kept confidential. Dependent of a deceased bank employee are usually given a job but she was denied job in Bank. In laws were demanding job for younger brother of patient and not for the wife of deceased son.

In such cases testing of wife of AIDS patient can result in discrimination from the in-laws and prospective employer.

DISCRIMINATION BY SOCIETY (2/35 CASES)

Case Study:

26 year old recently married male with psoriatic erythrodema was admitted in ward

Turned out of the HIV positive

Wife was also positive

Potential for vertical transmission was discussed thoroughly.

After one year they came with a baby and the husband was terminally ill.

On discussion couple said:

"If we don't have a child, our family members and community won't allow us to live in peace".

They did not come for antenatal care because of apprehension that they would be advised regarding medical termination of pregnancy and so the wife
could not be started on treatment for prevention of parent to child transmission.

REFERENCES: