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Sick and solo: A qualitative study on lived experience of living with HIV/AIDS in Somalia

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HIV-stigma and the resultant fear of being identified as HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)-positive can compromise the effectiveness of HIV programs by undermining early diagnosis and anti-retroviral treatment initiation and adherence of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). The aim of this study is to explore the situation of PLWHA to better inform researchers, program managers and policymakers in order to improve the national response to HIV/AIDS, and to scale up testing and treatment of HIV in Somalia. A qualitative study using unstructured interviews was conducted in Mogadishu in 2017. A convenience sampling approach was used to recruit 13 participants, including 10 persons who live with HIV/AIDS and three senior officials who work for the HIV program at the Ministry of Health. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis. Our findings show that people do not seek voluntary diagnosis and treatment of HIV. They come to know about their status when their partners are found HIV positive, they are tested for other clinical purposes, or when an individual's health deteriorates, and all other means fail to work in improving his/her situation. The study reports a widespread stigma subjected to PLWHA by their family members, society, employers and health providers, which continue to undermine the scale-up of testing and treatment of PLWHA in Somalia. The study also pointed out that a shortage of facilities that provide HIV diagnosis, counseling and treatment, which is another critical challenge in HIV control program in Somalia. Addressing stigma and discrimination subjected to PLWHA are critical to a successful HIV response in Somalia. However, to address stigma, HIV programs need evidence on effective interventions at individual, community and societal levels in order to strategically incorporate stigma and discrimination reduction into national HIV/AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome) programs.

Biography

Abdulwahab M Salad is the Deputy Director at School of Public Health and Research, Somali National University. His research interest involves in the field of infectious diseases, maternal and child health as well as occupational and environmental health. He has authored number of international peer-reviewed articles.

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