



Half of People With Hepatitis Are Scared to Share Their Diagnosis

Many people with hepatitis avoided seeking health care services when needed because they expected to face discrimination and stigma.

April 15, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

Half of Europeans living with [hepatitis B](#) (HBV) or [hepatitis C](#) (HCV) struggle to share their diagnosis with others due to stigma, according to a multicountry study presented at the [World Hepatitis Summit](#).

Hepatitis causes inflammation of the liver and affects nearly 354 million people worldwide, [according to Health Policy Watch](#). When untreated, it can lead to [scarring of the liver \(cirrhosis\)](#), [liver cancer](#), the need for a liver [transplant](#) and death. In fact, each year, over a million people die of conditions related to hepatitis, such as cancer.

Conducted by the World Hepatitis Alliance and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the study surveyed people living with HBV and HCV in select European countries to examine hepatitis-related [stigma](#) and [discrimination](#).

Stigma is often caused by lack of knowledge about hepatitis and [how it is transmitted](#). This can negatively impact peoples' personal and professional lives as well as their mental health. Stigma can also act as a barrier to seeking medical treatment and restrict work, study or travel opportunities.

According to the study, almost half of people living with HCV (46%) and over a quarter (26%) of people with HBV reported not being treated well in health care settings.

Four out of 10 people with HCV and one in six people with HBV said they avoided seeking health care services when they needed them because they expected to face discrimination and stigma. Indeed, 38% of people with HCV reported hearing health care professionals talking inappropriately about them.

What's more, about a quarter of people living with HBV and HCV have not told their family (23%) or friends (25%) that they have hepatitis.

"Living with hepatitis is challenging enough, and the added burden of discrimination whether in social or health care settings can have a hugely negative impact on peoples' quality of life," World Hepatitis Alliances' CEO, Cary James, said in a news release. "More needs to be done to reduce the stigma that surrounds hepatitis. Our ambition for this new study is to help policymakers formulate informed policies and strategies to reduce stigma and discrimination among people living with hepatitis and improve their quality of life."

Ending stigma is key to eliminating hepatitis, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), which set an [international goal to eliminate viral hepatitis](#) by 2030.

"The findings from this important study provide a deeper understanding of stigma and discrimination related to viral hepatitis, much needed to help improve the lives of people suffering from this disease," ECDC director Andrea Ammon said.