

# Stigma and disinformation are still common in population approaching the Anlaids Forum

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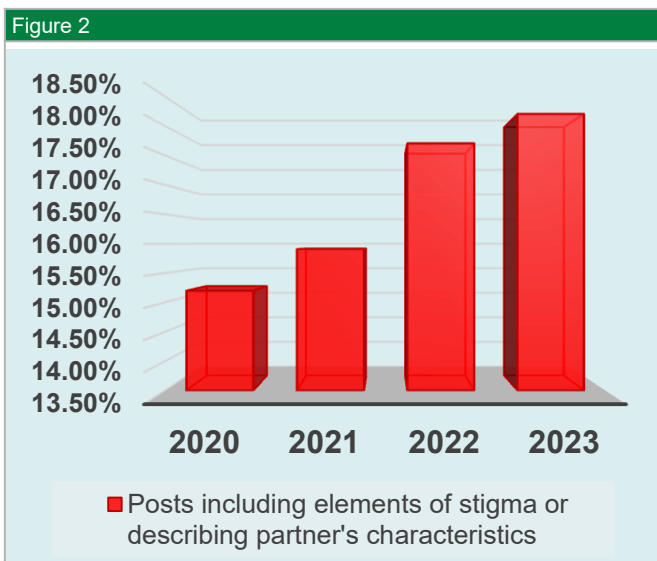
## Background

- The Anlaids forum is a virtual space where people can ask questions about HIV, without any prior moderation, the risks they may have taken during their sexual experiences and possible remedies. (Figure 1).
- In this study, we wanted to understand whether the Forum population still identifies 'risk categories' in partners or stigmatizes people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHIV).



## Material and Methods

- We selected all discussions that reported sexual intercourses in the period 2020-2023 containing stigma items that labeled people or their behaviors or toward PLWHIV. Quantity and quality of words related to stigma or shame were considered.
- We then investigated whether stigma or characteristics of partners had changed over the years, whether it was related to sexual orientation, and whether the presence of these elements may have contributed to a misunderstanding in risk assessment.



## Results

- Out of 2,685 posts in the analyzed period, 451 (16.8%) contained at least one element among characteristics such as partner profession, lifestyle, ethnicity, sexual orientation or stigma for PLWHIV; these elements were present with an average of 15.2% in 2020, 15.9% in 2021, 17.7% in 2022 and 18.2% in 2023. These results are depicted in Figure 2.
- Firstly, we found that 126 (4.7%) of the pertinent contexts regarded men having sex with men (MSM), while 325 (12.1%) involved heterosexuals. Only 3.5% of the described situations presented a specific HIV risk, while 13.3% of the reports were not at risk.
- Considering partner profession, including sex work, this was specified by 285 (10.9%) Forum users (9.6% in 2020; 7.6% in 2021; 11.3% in 2022; 14.9% in 2023). These results are reported in Figure 3.
- In 120 cases (4.3%), a partner lifestyle or physical appearance was misleading taken as a factor to be considered (6.2% in 2020; 4.9% in 2021; 3.4% in 2022; 2.8% in 2023). Data are shown in Figure 4.
- Partner belonging of a particular ethnic group was cited 51 (1.9%) times (2.5% in 2020; 1.0% in 2021; 2.0% in 2022; 2.0% in 2023). These results are represented in Figure 5.
- Looking at the stigma toward PLWHIV, we found 47 (1.7%) related topics (1.9% in 2020; 1.7% in 2021; 1.5% in 2022; 1.7% in 2023). These results are illustrated in Figure 6.
- Overall, analyzing all topics we found that an average of 9.8% of people made a mistake in their reported risk assessment.
- Regarding the number of discussions containing the items under consideration, we did not find a significant trend. In addition, it was also not possible to establish relationships between sexual preferences and analyzed items, although it was noted that MSM tend to exhibit less partner bias.

Figure 3

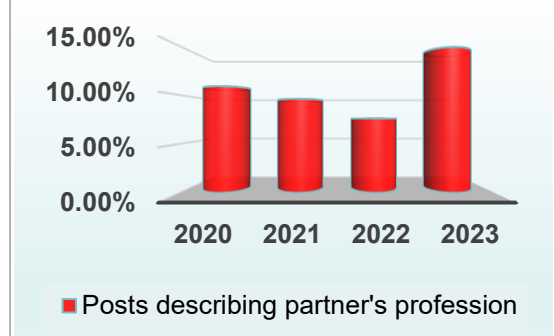


Figure 4

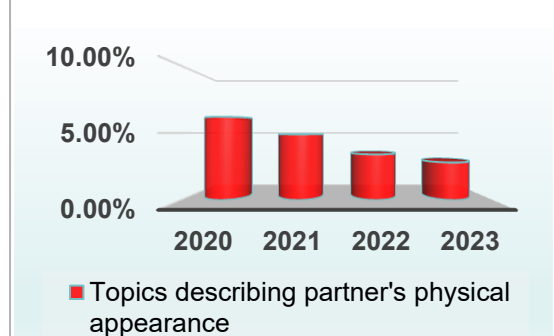


Figure 5

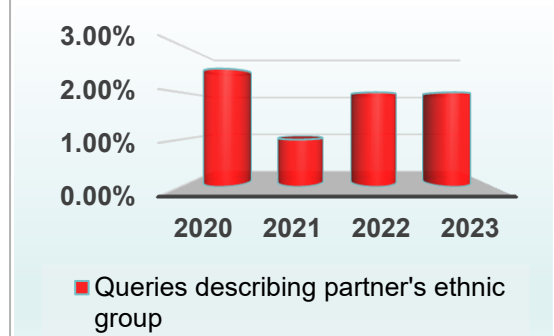
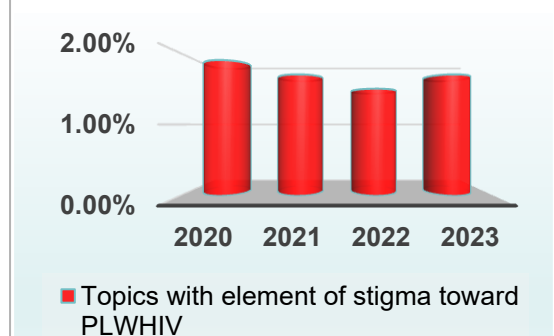


Figure 6



## Conclusions

- This data reveals that stigma and false beliefs about HIV transmission are still embedded, despite having no real basis. Furthermore, it could be noted that discriminating bias are often associated with misinformation. For these reasons it is extremely important that the scientific community and associations continue to work together and promote correct information and the use of non-stigmatizing language, as in the case of the 'U=U IMPOSSIBILE SBAGLIARE' campaign launched in Italy in 2023.

