



# Stigma and Discrimination in Private Sector HIV Counseling and Testing Services in Guatemala

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## Background and Purpose

- Most at-risk populations (MARPs) – female sex workers (FSW), men who have sex with men (MSM), people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) – are known to seek HIV counseling and testing (CT) services in the private sector in Guatemala
- Little is known about their experiences with CT services in this sector
- This study sought to describe:
  - Knowledge and practices of private health providers regarding CT services
  - Stigma of private providers towards MARPs
  - Experiences of MARPs in private CT services

## Methods

- Qualitative study in three departments: Guatemala, Quetzaltenango, Izabal
- Focus groups (FG) and in-depth interviews (IDI) with:
  - Clients (FSW, MSM, PLWHA)
  - Providers from private clinics/hospitals (doctors, nurses, administrative) and private labs (biochemists, lab technicians, administrative)
- Participants at least 18 years old, clients had done an HIV test in the private sector
- Recruited through professional contacts, NGOs, and in-person at health facilities and frequented locations

## Summary of Data Collection

Population	Guatemala	Izabal	Quetzaltenango
FSW	2 FG	1 FG	4 IDI
MSM	2 FG	1 FG	1 FG
PLWHA	2 FG	1 FG	1 FG
Private doctors	3 IDI	2 IDI	2 IDI
Private clinic staff	1 FG 4 IDI	1 FG	— 1 IDI
Private biochemists	2 IDI	1 IDI	2 FG
Private lab staff	1 IDI	1 FG	2 IDI

## Results

- Provider knowledge and practices of CT services
  - Generally no pre- or post-test counseling provided for negative tests
  - Some post-test counseling provided for positive tests
  - Consent rarely obtained for testing
  - Doctors have little knowledge of testing algorithms and labs have inconsistent protocols for confirmatory tests
- Provider stigma towards MARPs
  - Fear of HIV/AIDS is an element of stigma – PLWHA described as “contaminators”
  - Religious or moral reasons cited for stigma towards FSW or MSM
  - Concern that providing services to FSW or MSM can damage the reputation of their practice
  - Expectation that FSW and MSM maintain their identity clandestine when using their services

“A normal patient is well accepted in the clinic, but if they [FSW] are too obvious when they are in the waiting room, well (...) it’s a shame if a sex worker comes in the waiting room where the other patients are. They [patients] view the doctor who is seeing her unfavorably”  
*(clinic staff)*

“Just the fact of knowing someone has AIDS, one kind of casts them aside. As if only by touching them [it’s believed] you will get it. I think that yes, in many places they do this”  
*(clinic staff)*

- MARPs’ experiences in private CT services
  - MARPs perceive CT services in the private sector to be more confidential, reliable, faster than public sector
  - Treatment in private facilities depends on whether they are recognized as FSW and MSM
  - PLWHA described extreme lack of professionalism or sensitivity among private lab staff, such as inhumane treatment at the time of positive diagnosis

“In private clinics, when they see that someone is homosexual or ‘sexually diverse’, there’s always a rejection, even if you’re paying for a service, like they pay less attention to you, are very rude, you’d suppose that if someone is paying for a service it’s so they are well attended”  
*(MSM)*

“What I recommend is that you leave her because you’re very young and she is going to die”  
*(PLWHA quoting advice given by a private provider to her husband when giving her HIV+ result)*

## Conclusions

- Both users and providers revealed lack of technical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and sensitivity to the needs of MARPs seeking CT services in the private sector
- Private provider attitudes can also be attributed to the high levels of stigma and discrimination towards MARPs in Guatemalan society
- There is a great need for training and sensitizing private health providers that offer CT services

