Addressing stigma against Covid-19 survivors in Ghana

Case study from Ghana | August 2020 | External

Summary
Stigma against survivors of Covid-19 (and their families) has emerged as a major issue in Ghana, which in turn affects our response.

There exists widespread misconceptions and fear of people who have recovered from Covid-19, as they are believed to pose a health risk to others. Survivors of Covid-19 are widely avoided and stigmatized.

As a result, people with Covid-19 symptoms are often reluctant to be tested, for fear of being stigmatized if the result is positive.

To address stigma against Covid-19 survivors, Plan International Ghana collaborated with a local filmmaker and the Ministry of Health to produce a powerful video showing the harmful effects of stigma. The video can be viewed here.

This video is currently being shown widely on national television, on social media channels across the country and on Whatsapp. An audio version has been aired by an English-language radio station in the capital, Accra.

Background
Ghana’s borders have been closed since March 2020. The only exception to this relates to the repatriation of stranded Ghanaians, who are required to quarantine upon arrival.

Despite these measures, Ghana has experienced one of the highest case numbers of Covid-19 in the region, with most cases concentrated in the southern part of the country.

Stigma and discrimination against survivors of Covid-19 and their families (including children), has been widespread, as there remains a common belief and fear that those who have recovered remain infectious. People who present symptoms of Covid-19, as well as those who have tested for it (whether or not the result is positive), are frequently stigmatized. As a result, many people shy away from testing, calling an ambulance, or even visiting a health facility when they are ill, for fear of being associated with the condition.

This issue was frequently highlighted during weekly briefings from the Ministry of Health, where survivors (including influencers) were brought in to share their testimonies of the double burden they faced as stigmatized survivors of Covid-19.

The campaign
In response to the emerging and debilitating issue of stigma faced by survivors of Covid-19, Plan International Ghana decided to address the issue head on.

The team produced a powerful video that has been shared on television and social media, showing the harmful effects of stigma on Covid-19 survivors, their children and families, and the country as a whole.

Working with a local filmmaker, Plan International Ghana developed a script, based on community members’ experiences, which was then reviewed and approved by the Health Promotion Unit of the Ministry of Health.

The video was produced in a mix of English and local languages, and uses simple language spoken by children to increase inclusivity and accessibility.

The impact of the campaign
Plan International Ghana will be observing dynamics to understand how stigma is evolving in the country, by listening to community members and survivors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the names of characters in the video have already started being used informally.
Top Tips for addressing stigma relating to Covid-19

✓ We need to understand the **causes of stigma in our context** to be able to acknowledge and address it
  - The causes might be linked to one or multiple of the following: perceptions, history, rumors/misinformation, fear
✓ People’s fear and genuine **concern for their health and safety** may cause them to stigmatize others.
✓ We should:
  ✓ **Acknowledge** this fear
  ✓ Take concerns seriously and **listen**
  ✓ Address misinformation – spread **facts** (not fear)
  ✓ Avoid using **language** that perpetuates stigma
  ✓ **Ask people** what they would like in order to feel safe – if people are confident that they have the tools to keep themselves and their loved ones safe, the need to stigmatize others will likely reduce.
✓ Encourage **community-based solutions**
✓ Promote **actionable behaviours** – focus on what people **can do** rather than what they **should not**.
✓ Address genuine fears of contracting Covid-19 through our **programming** and **influencing** (e.g. providing PPE or advocating for safe isolation facilities)
✓ **Amplify voices** of trusted influencers who can encourage positive behaviours

Resources

**World Health Organization:**
- “Guidance to reduce stigma on health care workers, patients recovered from Covid-19 and people using masks and practicing social distancing”
- “A guide to preventing and addressing stigma associated with Covid-19”

**Breakthrough ACTION:**

**Webinar:**
- “Covid-19: The role of the media in addressing stigma” – PDF Slides

**Stigma toolkits from other infectious disease outbreaks:**
- HIV Stigma Toolkit, Ebola Stigma Toolkit, TB Stigma Toolkit

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