

## **Discriminatory attitudes against people tested for corona virus in the region of Mahdia (Tunisia)**

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### **Background:**

Several incidents of stigmatization of healthcare workers, COVID-19 patients and their families have come up during the current pandemic across the world.

### **Aim:**

To evaluate discriminative behaviors against people tested for Covid-19 in the governorate of Mahdia in Tunisia.

### **Methods:**

We performed a cross sectional study among people tested for Covid-19 from November to December 2020 in the region of Mahdia. Discrimination was assessed using a pretested brief questionnaire inspired from the reliable French version of HIV stigma scale. Trained members of the study team explained the study's purpose and collected data from each participant via phone calls.

### **Results:**

A total of 277 participants were recruited with a mean age of  $34.32 \pm 13.7$  years. Among them, 60.8% were women and 62.2% were tested positive for Covid-19. Fourty three percent of participants were health professionals with 25.3% of them were directly involved in the care of COVID-19 patients. More than half of respondents (61%) have experienced discrimination. Thus, 40% were subjected to verbal and physical assaults. Concerning stigma among health care workers, 60% were doctors and 67.2% have worked in a covid-19 care service. Our survey shows a higher level of Covid-19 related stigma among married respondents and those living with elderly people (46.8% and 43.8% respectively). Discrimination was associated with being a health care professional ( $p=0.05$ ), mainly a doctor ( $p=0.03$ ) and having COVID-19 infection ( $p=0.02$ ).

### **Conclusions:**

The continued discriminatory and stigmatising attitudes towards people tested for Covid-19 negatively impacts their access to health care services. We recognise a pressing need to improve the knowledge of Covid-19 transmission, and implement universal precautions across all health facilities.

### **Key messages:**

- The high prevalence of discriminatory attitudes against people tested for Covid-19 is alarming. It's an unpleasant experience causing numerous psychological distresses among those who undergo it.
- Establishing a positive safety culture and providing appropriate education to reduce the stigma towards infected people offers an effective way to improve the quality of care.