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# *Life between Struggle and Survival: A Case Study of People Living with HIV/AIDS*

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## Abstract

*HIV/AIDS is one of the major health concerns in the whole world. People living with HIV/AIDS has faced their fair share of struggles in the society. Due to the stigma and discrimination, PLHIV has faced a lot of hardships especially relating to employment and livelihood. The present case study was conducted to find out the issues and challenges faced by a person living with HIV/AIDS who is a daily wage labourer and highlighting her coping strategies in life as a person living with HIV/AIDS. Data for the study was collected through semi-structured interview, and the study has provided a detailed description of the case.*

*The struggle faced by the respondent emphasized the need for an urgent intervention regarding their jobs and livelihood which can help lessen their financial burdens and improve their standard of living.*
***Keywords:*** *Human immunodeficiency Virus, Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, PLHIV*

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## Introduction

HIV/AIDS remains a major health concern worldwide. According to World Health Organization, an estimated of 40.8 million people living with HIV were there by the end of 2024, where 65% of them are in the WHO African Region (WHO, 2025). WHO also reported that in 2024, there was an estimate of 630,000 people who died from HIV-related causes and an estimated of 1.3 million people who were infected by HIV. Although at present HIV infection can be cured, however, it has become a manageable chronic illness, due to access to effective HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, which enables the people living with HIV to lead a longer and healthier lives (WH0, 2025). According to UNAIDS report (2024), South Africa is the most affected country for having the most people living with HIV/AIDS with a total of 7.8 million, followed by India who ranked second with a total of 2.6 million. India has shown improvement in tackling the disease in the recent years, the country was able to reduce the infection to 44% since 2010. However, in terms of struggles and hardships faced by people living with HIV still exist especially when it comes to employment. Particularly due to stigma and discrimination, it has greatly affected the livelihood of people living with HIV.

## Methodology

The present study employed a case study method to investigate the research problem in depth. A case study is a commonly used method of research in social science. It is a thorough research and investigation of an individual, group or event. (Kushwaha & Kumar 2012).

## Objectives of the study

- To examine the issues and challenges faced by a person living with HIV.
- To study the coping strategies of a person living with HIV.

## Sources of data

The present study is based only on primary sources of data. The data was collected directly from the respondent through semi structured interview.

**2.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

The study employed purposive sampling to select a participant for the study. The participant was recruited through the Meghalaya State Network of Positive People (MSNP+) an organization that supports people living with HIV in Meghalaya.

**2.4 Data Collection Procedure**

Data was collected solely through interview after obtaining consent from the participant.

**2.5 Tools and Techniques of Analysis**

In the present study the investigator has used a self-constructed semi structured interview schedule.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

**2.6 Ethical Considerations**

The study adheres to ethical principles where informed consent was obtained from the participant before the interview. Participation was voluntary and the participant was informed on the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using a pseudonym. All data collected was used solely for research purposes only.

**2.7 Scope and limitations of the study**

The study was conducted in East Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya, with only one participant. As a single case study, the findings are limited to the personal experiences of the participant and cannot be generalized.

**Case Study**

This case study is about Sunita (name changed) a daily wage worker who resides in Khliehriat of East Jaintia Hills District, Meghalaya. When she was in class X (Ten) she became pregnant with her first child. However, her then-partner did not settle down with her, so she raised the child alone for two or three years before remarrying. She was infected with HIV about 11 years ago from her second partner. During her second pregnancy she

suffered a miscarriage and was hospitalized and that was when she had come to know about her HIV status. At first, she did not require any treatment due to her high CD4 count. However, she began receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) during her third pregnancy with her current (third) partner. Fortunately, her youngest child did not contract the virus. Currently, she is managing her livelihood by working whenever she being called by the employers for work.

### 3.1. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The issues and challenges are analyzed and discussed based on the themes below-

**3.1.1. Healthcare Access and Treatment-** She began her antiretroviral therapy (ART) in 2021. As for getting her medication on time, the Meghalaya State Network of Positive People (MSNP+) has played a crucial role in ensuring she receives her medication. The organization takes responsibility for delivering ART to clients, sparing her from traveling to town for refilling her medication. She also expressed her satisfaction with the quality of care provided by healthcare professionals and has not encountered any challenges when receiving treatment. The state government has also taken the initiative of providing better healthcare and treatment by upgrading the CHC hospital in the district to a civil hospital and this has provided a great helped the people living with HIV.

**3.1.2. Economic and Employment Challenges-** Maintaining a livelihood has always been one of the greatest challenges that she faced. For many years, she worked as a tea vendor in the local market, but a rumour began to spread about her HIV status, so, people started to avoid her, which affects her income. As a daily wage labourer, due to fear of discrimination and social exclusion she often conceals her status. Earning a stable income has been very hard and difficult, and she often relies on her husband for travel expenses. She acknowledged the support provided by the government and NGOs such as MSNP+, which offer free HIV testing and ART medication.

However, despite this, she has faced significant hardship in securing employment. Due to discrimination and workplace gossip she if often force to leave the job on her own. And the stigma that surrounds her illness has made it nearly impossible for her to find sustainable work.

**3.1.3. Stigma and Discrimination-** Sunita shared that she has no friends in her community due to her illness. Her family is aware of her condition, but there are stigma and discomfort when they interact with her. Even her husband often looks down on her because of her HIV status, which has impacted her emotional well-being. She recalled the disgust reaction people had on their face when they know about her condition. She strongly emphasized the need for the government to intensify awareness programs, particularly targeting healthcare workers, as they often contribute to the spread of confidential information about HIV-positive individuals. She often hears rumours about her and people would gossip about her, though none would confront her directly. One of her main concerns is the impact of stigma on her children. She fears that the society might discriminate them just because of her illness. Although she has revealed her HIV status to her family and in-laws, their response has been largely negative, leading to further isolation. Due to various reasons, she avoids revealing her status in any workplace as she fears that she might not be hired by people for future jobs.

**3.1.4. Mental Health-** When Sunita learns about her HIV diagnosis, she was suicidal and was distress emotionally. It was difficult for her to approach people because the fear social rejection especially with those who know her status. Also, managing her emotional and psychological well-being is still very challenging, especially due to her husband's alcoholism. However, she remains motivated for her children and focus on improving their future. She has attended multiple counselling sessions in Shillong, which she found highly beneficial. It has helped her on fighting against social stigma and handling discrimination more effectively.

**Coping Strategies**

The coping strategies are and examined and discussed based on the themes below-

**4.2.1 Emotional Coping and Mental Health-** Sunita initially struggled following her diagnosis, experiencing anxiety and stress. She acknowledged the immense psychological burden of societal judgment and stigma. One of the greatest challenges she faced was social isolation, as the people who were once close to her began to distance themselves from her. In response to the emotional toll of stigma and discrimination, she revealed that she has adopted a coping mechanism where she chooses to dismiss negative thoughts and focus on ways to improve her life for the better. Though she did take any psychological support, she motivates herself to maintain her emotional well-being.

**4.2.2. Support Systems and Social Networks-** Social support plays an important role in the well-being of a person living with HIV. Unfortunately, Sunita does not receive much emotional and social support she needed. Especially from her family members and close ones where she experiences rejections due to her illness. However, organizations such as **MSNP+** have provided her a good support where they provide counselling services and community engagement, and the organisation has played a vital role in assisting her journey as an HIV-positive individual, where they provide psychological and guidance on managing her condition.

**4.2.3. Healthcare and Treatment-** Adhering to antiretroviral therapy (ART) posed significant challenges for the respondent, due to her forgetfulness and the fear of being judged by other people when seen taking medication. There are times where she purposely avoided taking her medication to prevent people finding out her status. Despite these challenges, with the right support from MSNP+ staff, who assisted in making sure that medication was available when needed, she found access to ART quite manageable. While she had not faced any major problem in accessing healthcare services, she had yet to transfer her treatment centre to Khliehriat, which is the closest facility to her. Currently, she is seeking

medical assistance from Jowai. She expressed appreciation for government efforts in addressing the needs of individuals living with HIV/AIDS, stating that the healthcare services provided had been satisfactory.

**4.2.3. Sexual Health and Relationships-** The respondent's HIV status had not impacted her intimate relationships or sexual activities. She maintained transparency with all potential partners and ensure that they are aware of her condition. Although it was a challenge for her to disclose her status, she remained committed to honesty and the practice of safe sex. She always advocates for protection and to take necessary precautions when having sex. However, she takes caution when getting into a new relationship, as there is a need to disclose her status every time she has a partner.

**4.2.4. Coping with Stigma and Discrimination-** Stigma and discrimination against individuals living with HIV/AIDS continue to exist even in the health care system. The respondent had witnessed cases of discrimination, including from medical professionals. However, despite these challenges, she chose to fight against it by focusing on her personal well-being and her children's future, to ensure that they were not subjected to harassment or bullying due to her illness. To protect her mental health, she adopted a positive mindset, filtering out negative mindset and prioritize her happiness. She remained determined to lead a fulfilling life, demonstrating resilience in the face of societal prejudices.

## Conclusion

HIV/AIDS is still considered to be one of the most major health issues worldwide whereby at least 40.8 million cases were reported by the end of 2024. And most of PLHIV/AIDS faced various challenges in their day-to-day life especially regarding economic and employment, stigma and discrimination, mental health related problems and so on. In the present study, Sunita has her fair share of struggle as a person living with HIV/AIDS. Sunita's story demonstrates the economic difficulties faced by women who are suffering from chronic illnesses in the labor sector. The

difficulty in sustaining a stable employment or job due to gossiping and the cold shoulder shows how stigma and discrimination become a barrier not only to their health but also to their survival. Initiatives targeting empowerment should be provided such as vocational training, income support and legal support. These initiatives are very much as it ensures that women like Sunita can be independent.

Sunita's journeys serve as a reminder that though life can be extended medically, however, the support, understanding and acceptance from the society is what truly sustains it. Hence it is a collective responsibility to create that safe and sound environment for individuals living with HIV who are not merely surviving but are also thriving to be free from the stigma, discrimination and fear.

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