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UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES

**ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF STIGMA AND
DISCRIMINATION ON THE LINKAGES
ACROSS THE CONTINUUM OF HIV SERVICES
FOR MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN:
A REALIST APPROACH**

A Dissertation Submitted

by

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**in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor in Public Health Sciences**

Academic year 2020-2021

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SOLEMN STATEMENT

To pursue my PhD, I received a comprehensive funding package from the **Jacques Lewin – Inès Henriques De Castro “Esprit Libre” funds**.

After the enactment of the race laws of 1935, **Jacques** and his wife **Serah Davids** (from a Jewish family) decided to move from the Netherlands to Belgium. In order to keep their son, **Paul Igor**, safe, they decided to place him in a children’s home in Utrecht. But, when they came back, they found that the children were deported to Auschwitz and assassinated in the Nazi concentration camps in 1943. **Paul Igor** was killed at the age of 8 years old and soon after, **Serah Davids** died. A few years later, **Jacques** met and married **Inès Henriques De Castro** with whom he shared the same commitment in active resistance during the war and the loss of loved ones. On the advice from their friend, **André Sterling**, they decided to bequeath their fortune to the Université Libre de Bruxelles to contribute to the education of committed citizens, willing to engage in university studies related to **freedom and human rights in order to build fair and sustainable societies**.

Therefore, as an “**Esprit Libre**” fellow, I, do hereby solemnly agree to comply, by words and deeds, until the end of my days, with those values:

- **Resilience**, which has enabled the donors to transcend human barbarism, to rebuild themselves without hate and contribute to a better world.
- **Free inquiry**, which postulates, in all matters, rejection of the argument of authority and independence of judgment. This principle is a vector of intellectual emancipation which makes it possible to make rational choices.
- **Tolerance** towards all political, philosophical and religious choices as long as they are expressed with respect, freedom, equality and social justice.
- **Vigilance** in taking a stand against any anti-democratic manifestation and all forms of inequality and injustice.

Willy Dunbar

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"If I have seen further, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants": This sentence from Sir Isaac Newton expresses that this thesis exists because I have had access to an abundance of informational, instrumental, emotional and appraisal support from giants in Belgium, in Haiti and in the USA.

First, my thanks and appreciation to my family, promotor, co-promotor, advisory committee board, jury, peer supporters, health professionals, policy makers, academic researchers, medical students and MSM – who contributed directly to this study – through interviews, research engagement days, database and analysis.

Yves Coppieters, Nathalie Maulet, Elizabeth Paul and Aline Labat enabled me to turn an area of interest, arising from the protocol presented at the health systems research training program in summer 2017, into a fully-funded research proposal. I am grateful to Jean Christophe Goffard, Christian Raccurt, Jean William Pape, Isabelle Godin, Jean Macq, Jessy Dévieux, Michèle Jean-Gilles and Nancy Sohler for their support throughout this journey. The Jacques Lewin Inès Enriquez de Castro scholarship from ULB funded my PhD.

I am especially grateful for the steady approach to supervision that Yves has provided since beginning, accommodating the reality that a PhD was only ever going to be one of many things I was trying to do at once – however unwise he correctly considered that approach to be. As Yves picked up responsibility for supervision of this PhD in the last four years and has supported me in balancing my parallel scientific activities and personal life with my PhD study, he helped me in the process of drawing the threads of my thesis together.

I am also especially grateful to Nathalie and Elisabeth who are the precursors of this research thematic and the funding opportunity. William, Raccurt, Isabelle, Aline, Nancy and Jean have also supervised my works. I consider it a privilege to have been able to discuss my early ideas with those such insightful, experienced and knowledgeable researchers.

One of the things that has kept me going is that the research has never felt too far from the real world of injustice, rejection and ostracism that we live in. Along the way, I have had opportunities to discover the obstacles that MSM living with or without HIV are overcoming in our societies. I've also benefited from their insights and participations.

Lastly, I am grateful to my family, my friends and most of all to my loving, patient, encouraging, supportive and heroic wife Thamare who constantly stood by me through highs and lows.

Willy Dunbar

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated
To the memory of my grandmother,

Julie Dunbar,

Who passed away on April 11th, 2008.

She raised me with passion for science and
excellence.

She will be forever missed for her sacrifices
and endless

Love, which makes me able to get such
achievement and privilege.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
ARV	Antiretroviral Drug
CBO	Community Based Organization
CD4	Cluster of Differentiation of 4: T Cells
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CMO	Context – Mechanism – Outcome
EMR	Electronic Medical Records
HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
HC	Health Care
HCW	Healthcare workers
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMIC	Individual-motivational interviewing counselling
IPT	Initial Program Theory
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KP	Key Population
LGB	Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
LINKAGES	Linkages Across the Continuum of HIV Services for MSM Affected by HIV
LTFU	Loss to Follow-up
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MeSH	Medical Subject Headings
MSM	Men Who Have Sex with Men
MSPP	Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Population
PAHO	Pan-American Health Organization
PANCAP	Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS
PEPFAR	The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PLHIV	People Living with HIV
PrEP	Pre-exposure prophylaxis
PSI-Haiti	Population Services International - Haiti
PWID	People Who Inject Drugs
QA	Quality Assurance
SW	Sex Worker
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TG	Transgender Individuals
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

ABSTRACT

Analyzing the Impact of Stigma and Discrimination on the Linkages Across the Continuum of HIV Services for Men who have Sex with Men: A Realist Approach

Background and Aim: The world has now entered the third decade of the AIDS epidemic. Men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. Haiti still struggles in its response to this ongoing crisis throughout the continuum of services: disease prevention, treatment, and HIV related stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. Much of the information reported on people living with HIV has come from the general population, but only a few parts of some of those studies have focused on MSM. Therefore, the overall aim of this dissertation was to analyze the impact of stigma and discrimination on the continuum of HIV services for MSM in order to ascertain why, how and under which circumstances MSM are engaged, linked and retained along the care continuum.

Methods: For this dissertation, data were collected via literature review, electronic medical records, participant observations, focus groups and semi structured interviews with medical students, health care workers and MSM. Using a realist approach based on mixed methods design we sought to address the influence of HIV and sexual stigma on the continuum of HIV services and to identify key mechanisms emerging from the context and leading to the outcomes. Quantitative social and medical data were gathered and analyzed to produce descriptive and analytic statistics and qualitative data were analyzed thematically regarding the objectives.

Findings: Results indicated that MSM experienced stigma in multiple and overlapping layers. MSM described stigmatizing experiences stemming from religious sources, communities, family and friends, and from the medical establishment. From the social construction of heteronormativity in the society, several social and cultural factors, gender norms lie behind the stigma associated with sexual orientation and HIV. Moreover, medical students and healthcare givers still carry discriminatory attitudes towards them despite tailored interventions. Our analysis showed that current service delivery models are less than optimal in linking and retaining MSM, resulting in loss to follow-up in the continuum of care and failure to fully realize the health and prevention benefits. However, multi-level, contextual-based and socially accountable interventions can produce stigma mitigation through personal, health systems' and contextual mechanisms for better engagement, adherence and retention throughout the continuum.

Conclusions: The results within this dissertation are intended to inform health professionals in the planning and implementation of interventions for better continuum outcomes in Haiti and similar contexts. This thesis provides insight and contextual information for a socially accountable framework of adapted interventions. To end the AIDS epidemic by 2030, Haiti, the Caribbean region and the entire world urgently need to defy expectations to reach the left behind.

Keywords: Men who have Sex with Men; HIV; AIDS; Continuum of HIV services; Stigma; Discrimination; Realist evaluation; Context; Mechanism; Outcome; Social accountability; Haïti.

**PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THIS
THESIS**

Peer-reviewed Journal Articles

Dunbar W, Labat A, Raccurt C, Sohler L, Pape JW, Maulet L, Coppieters Y. A realist systematic review of stigma reduction interventions for HIV prevention and care continuum outcomes among Men who have Sex with Men. *International Journal of STD and AIDS*. 2020, Vol. 31(8) 712–723

Dunbar W, Alcide C, Raccurt C, Pape JW, Coppieters Y. Attitudes of medical students towards men who have sex with men living with HIV in Haiti: implications for social accountability. *International Journal of Medical Education*. 2020; 11:233-239 ISSN: 2042-6372 DOI: 10.5116/ijme.5f87.39c2

Dunbar W, Raccurt C, Pape JW, Coppieters Y. HIV infection among Men who have Sex with Men in the Caribbean: Reaching the left behind. *Pan American Journal of Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2021.12>

Dunbar W, N Sohler, Y Coppieters, Loss to follow up among men who have sex with men and heterosexual men living with HIV in Haiti, *European Journal of Public Health*, Volume 30, Issue Supplement_5, September 2020, ckaa166.737, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckaa166.737>

Dunbar W, N Sohler, Y Coppieters, Outcomes along the HIV continuum of care for Men who have Sex with Men in Haiti, *European Journal of Public Health*, Volume 30, Issue Supplement_5, September 2020, ckaa166.738, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckaa166.738>

Dunbar W, Labat A, Raccurt C, Sohler L, Pape JW, Maulet L, Coppieters Y. A realist evaluation of the linkages across the continuum of HIV services for men who have sex with men. *In review at AIDS and Behavior*

Mac-Seing M, Le Nogue D, Bagayoko CO, Sy A, Dumas JL, **Dunbar W**, Sicotte C, Nordlinger B, de Gaudemar JP, Maouche R, Flahault A. Make visible the invisible: innovative strategies for the future of global health, *BMJ Global Health* 2019;**4**: e001693.

Non-peer-reviewed Journal Articles

Dunbar W, Coppieters Y. Le Covid-19 suscite une nouvelle stigmatisation des personnes LGBT+. <https://theconversation.com/le-covid-19-suscite-une-nouvelle-stigmatisation-des-personnes-lgbt-138159>

Dunbar W, Coppieters Y. In Haiti, gay men infected with HIV are targets of discrimination. June 26, 2019. The Conversation United Kingdom. <https://theconversation.com/in-haiti-gay-men-infected-with-hiv-are-targets-of-discrimination-119318>

Dunbar W, Coppieters Y. En Haïti, la chasse aux homosexuels et victimes du VIH continue. The Conversation France. <https://theconversation.com/en-ha-ti-la-chasse-aux-homosexuels-et-victimes-du-vih-continue-116674>

Active participation in international conferences and symposiums

Dunbar W, Pape JW, Coppieters Y. Loss to follow up among men who have sex with men and heterosexual men living with HIV in Haiti. Poster presentation at the 16th World Congress on Public Health, Rome, Italy, 2020

Dunbar W, Pape JW, Coppieters Y. Outcomes along the HIV continuum of care for Men who have Sex with Men in Haiti. Poster presentation at the 16th World Congress on Public Health, Rome, Italy, 2020

Dunbar W, Pape JW, Raccurt C, Coppieters Y. Multi-level stigma reduction interventions for HIV prevention and care continuum outcomes among Men who have Sex with Men. Oral presentation at the 2020 Toward Unity for Health (TUFH-Network) Annual Conference, Mexico City, Mexico.

Dunbar W, Pape JW, Raccurt C, Coppieters Y. Attitudes of medical students towards men who have sex with men living with HIV in Haiti: implications for social accountability. Oral presentation at the 2020 Toward Unity for Health (TUFH-Network) Annual Conference, Mexico City, Mexico.

Dunbar W. Responsabilité Sociale de la Santé Publique: entre Adaptation et Évolution. Oral presentation at the Annual Congress of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, Brussels, Belgium, November 2018

Dunbar W, Pape JW, Coppieters Y. Stigmatization and Discrimination from Sexual Orientation and HIV Infection: Case of the Men who have Sex with Men in Haiti. Poster Presentation at the 2018 Toward Unity for Health (TUFH-Network) Annual Conference Community Empowerment for Health, University of Limerick, Ireland

Dunbar W, Sohler N, Poitevien G. Transforming Health Professional Education Through Social Accountability: Relevance and Impact of Training, Research and Community Action. Oral abstract presented at the World Summit of Social Accountability of Medical Education in Hammamet, Tunisia, 2017