

[Background]

HIV/AIDS-related stigma leads to the unfair or unjust treatment of HIV-positive persons based on discrimination against or biased views on them. Previous quantitative studies in Japan rarely examined their frequency of perceiving or experiencing such stigma. The present study examined the status of HIV/AIDS-related stigma, including changes in its pattern, as well as its influence on the mental status of HIV-positive persons, through 2 online questionnaire surveys separately conducted in Japan.

[Methods]

Two anonymous, self-administered online questionnaire surveys were conducted by the HIV Futures Japan Project. The first survey (T1) was conducted between 2013 and 2014, and 913 responses were valid for analysis. The second survey (T2) was conducted between 2016 and 2017, and 1,038 responses were valid for analysis. HIV/AIDS-related stigma was quantitatively compared using 3 measurement scales: HIV stigma-related experience scale (4 items, range: 4-16), HIV stigma-related fear scale (8 items, range: 8-32), and HIV stigma-related behavioral self-restriction scale (6 items, range: 6-30).

[Results]

At T2, the rate of answering the statement: “I become very cautious when I disclose my HIV-positive status to others” with “Yes” reached 92.8%. The rate was 85.7% for “In general, people avoid me after learning that I am HIV-positive”, 65.9% for “I am careful to keep my HIV-positive status a secret from others”, and 63.6% for “I may lose my position if my employer or superior learns about my HIV-positive status” (Table 1-3). In T1 and T2, the mean stigma-related experience scale scores were 9.40 (SD: 3.28) and 9.69 (3.43), respectively, mean stigma-related fear scale scores were 24.45 (5.33) and 25.32 (4.75), respectively, and mean stigma-related behavioral self-restriction scale scores were 19.63 (5.63) and 19.52 (5.55), respectively (Table 4). Both values at T1 and T2 were non-significant, but mean HIV stigma-related experience scale scores and HIV stigma-related fear scale scores were higher at T2, indicating that HIV/AIDS-related stigma had increased, rather than decreased, during this 3-year period. Using survey data at T1, multiple regression analysis, with scores from the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) as a dependent variable, HIV stigma-related experience scale scores and HIV stigma-related behavioral self-restriction scale scores as an explanatory variable, and the gender, age, and frequency of perceiving LGBT-related stigma as control variables, revealed a significant positive correlation with the explanatory variable (β =0.097, p =0.024; β =0.248, p =0.005, R^2 =0.157) (Fig.1).

[Conclusions]

HIV/AIDS-related stigma had not been reduced during the 3-year period between the 2 surveys. Such stigma was also suggested to negatively influence HIV-positive persons’ mental health. The results emphasize the necessity of creating detailed plans to implement HIV/AIDS-related stigma reduction measures as a domestic issue to be urgently addressed.

Table 1. HIV stigma-related experience (T2: %, N=1,038)

	Yes	No	No response
I regret disclosing my HIV-positive status to others.	50.5	49.1	0.4
Some people became physically distant as soon as they learned that I am HIV-positive.	47.0	52.4	0.6
Some people said that my HIV-positive status is my own fault.	41.8	57.7	0.5
I used to ask people close to me not to disclose my HIV-positive status to others.	47.3	52.2	0.5

Table 3. HIV stigma-related behavioral self-restriction (T2: %, N=1,038)

	Yes	Indecisive	No	No response
Being infected by HIV is disgraceful.	50.7	27.7	21.6	0.0
I unwillingly avoid communicating with others due to my HIV-positive status.	30.0	23.7	46.1	0.3
I am careful to keep my HIV-positive status a secret from others.	65.9	16.6	17.5	0.0
I avoid making new friends due to my HIV-positive status.	30.0	19.7	50.4	0.0
I lie when I talk about HIV with others.	64.3	21.3	14.3	0.2
I avoid sexual or romantic relationships with others due to my HIV-positive status.	42.1	23.5	34.2	0.2

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I have no COI with regard to our presentation

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Table 2. Feelings toward HIV stigma (T2: %, N=1,038)

	Yes	No	No response
There are few people around me who know that I am HIV-positive.	75.9	24.1	0.0
It is risky for me to disclose my HIV-positive status to someone.	86.4	13.5	0.1
I may lose my position if my employer or superior learns about my HIV-positive status	63.6	36.3	0.1
I face difficulty in keeping my HIV-positive status a secret from others.	51.8	48.2	0.0
In general, people avoid me after learning that I am HIV-positive	85.7	14.3	0.0
I become very cautious when I disclose my HIV-positive status to others	92.8	7.0	0.2
I worry about being discriminated against by people around me.	75.7	24.1	0.2
I am anxious that others may also know it if I disclose my HIV-positive status to someone.	85.2	14.8	0.0

Table 4. Mean scores from each stigma scale at T1 (N=913) and T2 (N=1,038)

	T1		T2	
	mean	SD	mean	SD
HIV stigma-related experience scale scores (4 items, range: 4-16)	9.40	3.28	9.69	3.43
HIV stigma-related fear scale scores (8 items, range: 8-32)	24.45	5.33	25.32	4.75
HIV stigma-related behavioral self-restriction scores (6 items, range: 6-30)	19.63	5.63	19.52	5.55

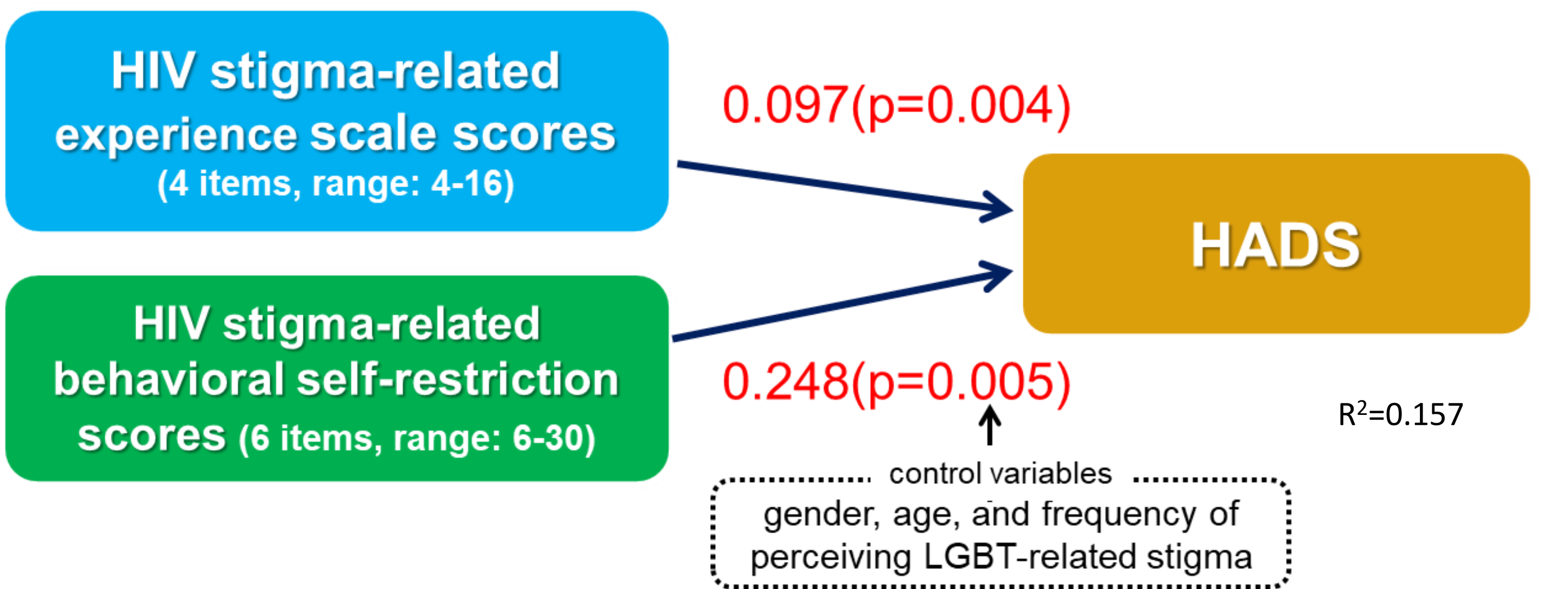


Fig 1. Multiple regression analysis, with scores from the HADS as a dependent variable (T1, N=903)