STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION-RELATED EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HBV DURING PREGNANCY: A STUDY IN URBAN AREA OF SHIJIAZHUANG, HEBEI PROVINCE, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Hepatitis B is a global disease with a high prevalence and serious consequences. More than 2 billion people all over the world have been infected with the Hepatitis B virus (HBV), and more than 350 million people develop chronic (lifelong) infection after the acute infection (Kao and Chen, 2002). As a disease that has been stigmatized, Hepatitis B deeply influences the infected patient’s daily life. However, unlike other infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, research on its social aspects is rare.

This study aims to describe the HBV-related stigma and discrimination and women’s experiences of living with HBV during pregnancy in the Chinese socio-cultural context. Relying on qualitative methodology and social construction perspective, this study tries to understand how stigma and discrimination related experiences of women living with HBV during pregnancy are constructed. This study was carried out in Shijiazhuang—the capital city of Hebei province, China. Multiple data collection methods were used including in-depth interviews and key informant interviews.

The findings reveal that the HBV-positive women faced many problems such as losing jobs and being rejected by their friends. Such events consequently lead to their depression and denial or hiding of their HBV-positive status. It brought unnecessary pain for those infected women. This study shows that stigma and discrimination against women living with HBV during pregnancy are multi-leveled ranging from structural-, individual- to self-stigmatization and discrimination, each of which contributes to different constructions of the women’s experience. Furthermore, the study clarifies the social construction process of HBV-related meaning, stigma and discrimination, and experience of women living with HBV during pregnancy. The constructed meaning and the enhancement of stigma and discrimination are found to cause the stigmatization and discrimination against people living with HBV in today’s Chinese society. Many socio-cultural factors contribute to the construction process, such as public policy, mass media, people’s social relationships, and so on.

The findings show the need to provide appropriate and comprehensive HBV-related health education and policy reforms to protect HBV-positive women from stigma and discrimination and reduce their unnecessary pain in living with HBV.

KEY WORDS: HEPATITIS B/ STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION/ EXPERIENCE/ CHINESE WOMEN/ SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

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