

PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH HIV STIGMA
IN A POPULATION OF OLDER ADULTS LIVING WITH HIV

BACKGROUND

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (2010) there has been an upward trend in the annual percentage of AIDS case reports among older Canadians. Despite improved public understanding of HIV disease, HIV stigma negatively impacts the mental health, quality of life and social experiences of older adults living with HIV. The primary objective of this study was to determine sociodemographic, psychosocial and health related variables that contribute to HIV related stigma among a large sample of older adults living with HIV in Ontario.

MEASURES

Baseline enrollment data from people with HIV who participated in the OHTN Cohort Study were used. The study analyzed data from 377 participants, age 50 years and older who completed an assessment battery between September, 2007 and March, 2010. Data on sociodemographic (age, partner status, income and race), psychosocial (depression, coping, mastery and social support) and health-related variables (self-rated health, alcohol use and time since diagnosis) were placed in a multiple linear regression analysis with total score on the HIV stigma scale as the dependent variable.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides background characteristics of older adults in the sample. The majority of older adults living with HIV disease were male, born in Canada, White, and had an HIV exposure of MSM. Forty one percent identified as married or living in a committed relationship. Table 2 provides the results of multiple regression with HIV related stigma as the dependent variable. Emotional and informational social support ($p<.001$), and mastery ($p<.001$) served as protective factors against stigma while use of maladaptive coping ($p<.01$) and less time since diagnosis ($p<.01$) were associated with greater stigma. Older women ($p<.05$), heterosexual men ($p<.05$) and bisexual men ($p<.05$) had higher scores of HIV-related stigma as compared to the gay men in the sample, even when controlling for all three clusters of sociodemographic, psychosocial and health related variables. The final model adjusting for all factors simultaneously accounted for >30% of the variation ($R^2 = .31$).

CONCLUSIONS

Findings suggest the importance of healthy internal mechanisms such as mastery, and external factors such as emotional and informational social support which protect older adults living with HIV/AIDS against the deleterious effects of HIV stigma. Interventions designed to reduce the impact of stigma and strengthen these protective components among older women and heterosexual men living with HIV need to be examined.

Factors associated with decreased HIV stigma

- >> Older age
- >> Greater emotional-informational social support
- >> Greater mastery
- >> Excellent/good self-rated health

Factors associated with increased HIV stigma

- >> Gender (women)
- >> Sexual orientation (heterosexual men, bisexual men)
- >> Less time since diagnosis
- >> Increased maladaptive coping

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N=405)

	Total N	Women		Straight Men		MSM		p-value ¹
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
Socio-Demographic Variables								
Age (mean, SD) Range 50-86	405	44	56.6 (4.7)	50	58.1 (6.7)	311	56.9 (6.26)	=.42
Income								
< \$30,000	206	26	60.5%	36	75.0%	144	46.6%	=.001
≥ \$30,000	194	17	39.5%	12	25.0%	165	53.4%	
Marital Status								
Married/Common-Law/Committed Relationship	169	11	25.0%	28	56.0%	130	41.8%	<.001
Separated/Divorced	45	18	40.9%	10	20.0%	17	37.8%	
Single	191	15	34.1%	12	24.0%	164	52.7%	
Race								
White	314	24	54.5%	26	52.0%	264	84.9%	<.001
African or Black	36	13	29.5%	13	26.0%	10	3.2%	
Other/ mixed race	55	7	15.9%	11	22.0%	37	11.9%	
Psychosocial Variables								
Depression (CES-D)								
Yes (Score = ≥ 16)	117	22	51.2%	17	35.4%	78	25.6%	<.01
No (Score = < 16)	279	21	48.8%	31	64.6%	227	74.4%	
Health-Related Variables								
Harmful Alcohol Use								
Yes	128	9	20.5%	19	38.0%	100	32.2%	=.17
No	277	35	79.5%	31	62.0%	211	67.8%	
Time Since HIV+ Diagnosis (mean, SD)	405	44	13.7 (5.8)	50	11.5 (6.1)	311	16.2 (5.7)	<.001
Self-Rated Health								
Excellent/very good/good	333	37	84.1%	37	74.0%	259	83.3%	=.27
Fair/poor	72	7	15.9%	13	26.0%	52	16.7%	

¹ p-value was derived from chi square tests for categorical variables and ANOVA for continuous variables
SD = Standard Deviation
MSM = Men who have sex with men
Note: Total numbers vary due to missing data

Table 2. Unstandardized coefficients for regression of HIV stigma on gender and sexual orientation among adults over 50 living with HIV/AIDS (n=377)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
Focal Variable								
Gender/Orientation (ref = gay men)								
Women	8.48	1.93 ^a	7.22	2.07 ^b	6.16	1.89 ^b	5.69	1.88 ^b
Straight men	8.63	1.86 ^a	8.35	1.99 ^a	6.39	1.80 ^a	5.16	1.83 ^b
Bisexual men	8.45	2.51 ^b	8.35	2.52 ^b	7.63	2.28 ^b	7.20	2.26 ^b
Socio-demographic Variables								
Age at Interview (in years)			-0.36	0.96 ^a	-0.28	0.09 ^b	-0.27	0.09 ^b
Personal gross yearly income(per \$20,000)			-0.44	0.22 ^c	-0.10	0.21	-0.10	0.21
Marital Status (ref = married)								
Divorced/Separated			3.51	2.23	1.94	2.02	2.03	1.99
Single			1.26	1.26	0.38	1.16	0.32	1.14
Race¹ (ref = white)								
Black or African			0.74	2.29	0.60	2.07	0.45	2.06
Other/mixed race			-0.68	1.77	-2.57	1.61	-3.46	1.61 ^c
Psychosocial Variables								
CED score ≥ 16					-0.49	1.40	-1.14	1.40
Maladaptive coping					0.36	0.11 ^b	0.35	0.11 ^b
Emotional-Informational Social Support					-0.30	0.07 ^a	-0.29	0.07 ^a
Mastery					-0.83	0.19 ^a	-0.81	0.19 ^a
Health-related Variables								
Hazardous alcohol use							-0.84	1.15
Time since HIV+ diagnosis							-0.25	0.09 ^b
Self-rated health (ref = excellent/good)							2.97	1.46 ^c
Adjusted R²	.10		.13		.30		.32	

¹ There were not enough individuals to include other racial groups
^a p < .001
^b p < .01
^c p < .05