

Resilience and Flourishing among People Living With HIV: A National Study Of Australian Gay Men

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HIV and Mental Health – What We Know and Don't Know

- PLHIV have up to twice the rates of depression and anxiety compared to the general population
- But despite challenges of living with HIV, such as HIV-related stigma, we also know that large numbers do not live with poor mental health
- We don't know much about positive forms of well-being in PLHIV populations, such as **resilience** and **flourishing**. We need to know more to have a complete picture of mental health and to develop the most effective well-being support programs

HIV and Mental Health – Resilience and Flourishing

- **What is resilience?**
 - A capacity to bounce back quickly from stressful or challenging life events
 - This capacity may be increased with social support, developing specific coping strategies, learning from past experience, and other resources
 - High resilience is linked with lower risk of future mental health problems

HIV and Mental Health – Resilience and Flourishing

- **What is flourishing?**
 - The highest level of positive well-being
 - Approx. 20% of population is in a state of flourishing
 - Two main components:

Hedonic	Frequent positive emotions (happiness, contentment, optimism)
Eudemonic	Sense of meaning, purpose, values A values-driven life, being true to oneself, self-acceptance, a sense of authenticity

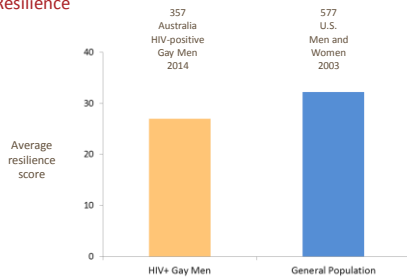
Aims and Objectives

- To help provide a more complete picture of mental health in PLHIV populations by conducting a study of two key states of positive well-being: **resilience** and **flourishing**
- The study focused on Australian HIV+ gay men in this case and had two main objectives:
 - To provide national data using standard measures of resilience and flourishing
 - To identify demographic and psychosocial factors associated with resilience and flourishing

Methods

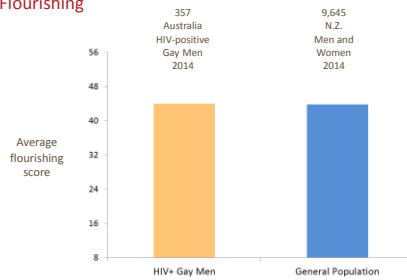
- National online community-based survey known as "Healthy Minds" August – December 2014
- Resilience measured with the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale; Flourishing measured with the Flourishing Scale
- Participants recruited via Facebook, Grindr, The Institute of Many (TIM), database of PLHIV research volunteers, promoted by HIV organisations, word-of-mouth referrals
- 357 HIV-positive gay men aged 18 – 81 years, mean age = 46.2 years

Resilience



- HIV-positive gay men had lower average resilience scores than general population data (a population-based study conducted in the United States)
- Large numbers had low resilience scores: 77 men (22%) had scores of 20 or less

Flourishing



- HIV-positive gay men were just as likely to be flourishing compared with a general population sample (a population-based study conducted in New Zealand)
- Large numbers had high flourishing scores: 103 men (29%) had scores > 50

Which factors predict resilience?

Factor	Analysed in a Multivariable Linear Regression	Impact	Significance
Age	✗		
Education	✗		
Income	✗		
Employment	✗		
Country of birth	✗		
In a relationship	✗		
Year of HIV diagnosis	✗		
Treated unfairly due to sexual orientation	✗		
Treated unfairly due to HIV	✗		
Internalised HIV-related stigma (e.g., shame)	✓	no internalised stigma = ↑ resilience	p < .001
Number of close friends	✗		
Emotional support	✗		
Belonging/companionship	✗		
Tangible/practical support	✗		

Which factors predict flourishing?

Factor	Analysed in a Multivariable Linear Regression	Impact	Significance
Age	✗		
Education	✗		
Income	✗		
Employment	✓	not unemployed = ↑ flourishing	p = .009
Country of birth	✗		
In a relationship	✗		
Year of HIV diagnosis	✗		
Treated unfairly due to sexual orientation	✗		
Treated unfairly due to HIV	✗		
Internalised HIV-related stigma (e.g., shame)	✓	no internalised stigma = ↑ flourishing	p = .03
Number of close friends	✗		
Emotional support	✓	emotional support = ↑ flourishing	p = .01
Belonging/companionship	✓	sense of belonging = ↑ flourishing	p < .001
Tangible/practical support	✓	practical support = ↑ flourishing	p = .003

Summary

- In this sample of HIV-positive gay men, resilience was lower than general population averages. But the men were no less likely to be flourishing.
- It would appear that social support is an important factor for flourishing.
- But internalised stigma appears to be a major issue for resilience. Feelings of low self-worth can make it hard for people to overcome life challenges if they already believe they are hopeless.
- In all, there are many cases of high positive well-being among HIV-positive gay men despite the challenges of living with HIV. But it is possible to be flourishing and not to have high resilience, so resilience-building programs may be needed to help the "flourishers" to keep flourishing and to help those in poorer mental health to flourish in the future.
- Need more research on resilience. Reducing stigma is important but there may be other factors that we need to know about to inform resilience-building programs.

Thank you

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