

COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR FOR THE MENTAL HEALTH OF GAY MEN LIVING WITH HIV

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Background

Depression and anxiety are at disproportionately high rates among gay men living with HIV. Stigma is known to play a large role in these rates. While reducing stigma remains a key objective, it is also important to identify forms of resilience that help to protect the mental health of men in this population.

Collective resilience is one form of resilience. While researchers have tended to focus specifically on the resilience of individuals, collective resilience refers to any group or community having a capacity to overcome challenges to its well-being or survival.

It is thought that resilient groups or communities are better at facilitating mutual support, creating a sense of shared purpose, and utilising each other's skills to the benefit of the group. For these reasons, participating in resilient groups is likely to be beneficial to mental health and well-being. Resilient groups can include almost any group, such as social groups, community groups, organisations, sports clubs, and more.

Aim

We examined whether participating in a group that was perceived as highly resilient was associated with better mental health outcomes among gay men living with HIV.

Method

Data Collection

A total of 357 Australian gay men living with HIV completed *Healthy Minds*, a nationwide survey of the mental health and well-being of people living with HIV (PLHIV). The survey was publicised across Australia, including advertising on Facebook, The Institute of Many (a Facebook community of PLHIV), Grindr, and promoted by HIV organisations.

Measures

The survey included the Fletcher-Lyons Collective Resilience Scale (FLCRS), which measures the degree to which people perceive their group as resilient. We also measured depression, anxiety, general stress, positive mental health, individual resilience, satisfaction with life, internalised HIV-related stigma, and self-rated overall health.

Results

Men who belonged to a group with high collective resilience were significantly less likely to experience depression, anxiety, general stress, and internalised HIV-related stigma than those in a low collective resilience group. They were also significantly more likely to experience positive mental health, individual resilience, life satisfaction, and overall better health.

Conclusion

Belonging to a resilient group appears to be a strong protective factor for the mental health and well-being of gay men living with HIV.

Further findings from this study appear in Lyons, A. & Heywood, W. (2016). Collective resilience as a protective factor for the mental health and well-being of HIV-positive gay men. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*.

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