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Living with HIV in Finland: stigma, psychosocial functioning and the role of social support

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Introduction:

- ✂ The AIDS pandemic continues to be a serious global health concern with an estimated 38 million individuals infected worldwide the majority of which are in developing countries.
- ✂ In many developed countries, the use of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) has been associated with dramatic health benefits, improving prognosis for individuals infected with HIV.
- ✂ With HIV increasingly regarded as a "chronic" disease in developed countries, there is a need to further clarify the psychosocial aspects of HIV/AIDS as disease-related stigma continues to impact on the individual and society.



Objectives:

The present investigation looks into levels of perceived stigma, perceived social support and psychosocial functioning among individuals consulting at an infectious diseases clinic in Helsinki, Finland.

Design:

HIV-positive individuals consulting at the HIV/AIDS Clinic at the Aurora Hospital (HUCH Division of Infectious Diseases), Helsinki, Finland, were recruited within a 2-week period in June 2004. They were asked to complete the following scales:

- ✂ HIV Stigma Scale (Berger 1996)
- ✂ Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al. 1998)
- ✂ Texas Christian University (TCU) Psychosocial Functioning Scale (Knight et al. 1994)



Main Outcomes:

Scores for the HIV Stigma Scale, the Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support and the TCU Psychosocial Functioning Scale

Results:

- ✂ The respondents do not generally feel stigmatized but they have issues with disclosing their HIV status.
- ✂ They show a pattern of good psychosocial functioning
- ✂ Most respondents report that they get strong support from friends, family and significant others.

Conclusion:

The small number of participants (n=12) recruited in the 2-week study period precluded any statistically significant results but the study demonstrated that the instruments can be used to investigate psychosocial parameters among people living with HIV in Helsinki, Finland.



Loneliness is worse than HIV.