



A Social-behavioural Profile of Older Adults with HIV/AIDS in Ontario, Canada

- *Socio-demographic Profile of Older Adults with HIV/AIDS: Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences*. Brennan DJ, Emlert CA, Brennenstuhl S, Rueda S and the OHTN Cohort Study Team. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 2013.
- *Protective and Risk Factors Associated with Stigma in a Population of Older Adults Living with HIV in Ontario, Canada*. Emlert CA, Brennan DJ, Brennenstuhl S, Rueda S, Hart TA, Rourke SB and the OHTN Cohort Study Team. *AIDS Care*, 2013

The questions

What are the socio-demographic characteristics of people living with HIV in Ontario over the age of 50? Are there differences between different groups of people living with HIV—namely women, heterosexual men, gay men and bisexual men? And do these groups experience HIV-related stigma differently?

The answers

Most of the study participants identified as gay men (65.8%), followed by heterosexual men (16.7%), women (10.6%) bisexual men (6.9%). The average age was 57 years, with over 87% of participants under 65 years. About three-quarters of participants were born in Canada, almost 80% identified as White, and 7% identified as Aboriginal. Sixty percent of the participants were retired, unemployed, or unable to work due to disability. There were differences noted between women, heterosexual men, gay men and bisexual men with respect to education, personal incomes, employment, being Canadian-born and identifying as White.

Why is this question important?

More people aged 50 years and older are getting diagnosed with HIV, plus people already infected with HIV are living longer because of antiretroviral therapy (ART). It is important to understand who makes up this growing population especially since until recently, interventions, policies, and service delivery have largely been designed to respond to a younger population of people living with HIV.

How was the study conducted?

Information on socio-demographic, health-related, psychosocial, and clinical variables was collected on 1,103 participants from the OHTN Cohort Study (OCS) who were at least 50 years old at their last interview. The variables of interest included:

- Socio-demographic – age, highest education level achieved, income, employment status, marital status, race
- Health-related – smoking history, non-medicinal drug use, alcohol use, time since HIV diagnosis, most recent CD4 cell count and viral load test results
- Psychosocial & clinical – scores from standardized tests measuring stigma, health-related quality of life, social support, coping, mastery, and depression

The analysis of socio-demographic and health-related information was based on 643 participants who completed the Core Questionnaire. The analysis of psychosocial and clinical information was based on 460 participants who completed the Extended Questionnaire. The analysis of the effects of stigma in this population was based on the stigma scores of 378 participants who completed the Extended Questionnaire.



What else did we learn?

The majority of the older people living with HIV identified as gay or bisexual men, although there were a significant number of women and heterosexual men. Findings suggest that gay and bisexual men are doing fairly well when compared to the heterosexual groups of women and men. For example, gay and bisexual men achieved higher levels of education and income, scored higher on mental health quality of life scales, reported better coping skills and lower depression scores when compared to the other groups. Women and heterosexual men living with HIV experienced more HIV-related stigma than gay and bisexual men. Other life factors such as being older, having a longer time since HIV diagnoses, social support and greater control over life decisions (mastery) were associated with lower levels of stigma.

What's next?

There may be populations of older people living with HIV who are not getting the full benefits of HIV care. HIV services may need to be incorporated into services for older people, or services for people living with HIV need to adapt to the growing populations of older people living with HIV. This study highlights the need for tailored interventions and service delivery to improve the health and well-being of older people living with HIV by gender and sexual orientation.

Want to know more?

The original text version of *Socio-demographic Profile of Older Adults with HIV/AIDS: Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences* is available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23521923> and the text version for *Protective and Risk Factors Associated with Stigma in a Population of Older Adults Living with HIV in Ontario, Canada* is available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23452022>.

The **Ontario HIV Treatment Network Cohort Study (OCS)** is an ongoing research study that collects clinical, social and behavioural information about people living with HIV (PHA) in Ontario. Participation in the study is voluntary, and all personally identifying information of study participants is removed to ensure confidentiality. The OCS was established to improve our understanding of HIV and to inform HIV prevention, care and treatment strategies for people living with HIV and groups at increased risk of HIV infection. For more information about the OCS, please contact the OCS Research Coordinator, Brooke Ellis at: bellis@ohln.on.ca.