



Gender Differences in Severity and Correlates of Depression Symptoms in People Living with HIV in Ontario, Canada

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The question

How many women with HIV in Ontario experience depression? How many men? Are there differences between how severe women and men living with HIV experience depression? Are there other factors that influence depression among women and men living with HIV?

The answer

By using the results from a depression screening scale administered to OHTN Cohort Study (OCS) participants, the study authors found that women had higher depression scores than men. Women also had more total scores past the scale cut-offs than men, indicating more mild-moderate depression (44% versus 33%) and more severe depression (31% versus 23%).

Why is this question important?

Previous research has shown that depression can have a negative impact on the lives of people living with HIV. Knowing the risk factors for depression among people living with HIV can help clinicians better identify whom among their patients may need treatment or support. Helping people living with HIV manage their depression can result in better health outcomes overall.

What else did we learn?

Being over 40 years influenced depression scores differently among women and men, with female participants reporting more depression with increased age and male participants reporting less depression with increased age. Men currently using antiretroviral therapy (ART) also showed lower overall depression scores.

Other factors, or correlates, that influence depression among people living with HIV identified by the authors are: having less education, living with a disability, having low family income, having high overall stigma scores, and having a higher number of life stressors were significantly associated with higher depression scores in both male and female participants.



How was the study conducted?

The OCS administers two different Questionnaires across Ontario—the Core and the Extended. As part of the Extended Questionnaire, participants are asked to complete the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)—20 questions that screen for depressive symptoms. The authors used the scores from this scale and ranked them as neutral, mild-moderate, or severe. The authors then compared the depression scores against other responses from OCS participants, such as demographic characteristics, health variables, HIV-related stigma, and life stressors.

What's next?

The authors suggest a need for depression screening measures that recognize the differences between women and men and gender-specific factors of depression among people living with HIV.

Want to know more?

This study was published by the Journal of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care. The summary version is available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24899261>

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@ohtn.on.ca.