Prevalence of Stigma, Depression and Anxiety in a Cohort of PLWH in Lebanon: A Cross-Sectional Study

570

Remie El Helou[1], Alison Haidar[2], Nesrine Rizk[1*].
[1] Division of Infectious Disease, Department of Internal Medicine, American University of Beirut Medical Center, Beirut, Lebanon
[2] Rafic Hariri School of Nursing, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon

*Corresponding author

BACKGROUND

- Adherence to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) is associated with improved quality of life and increased life expectancy for People Living with HIV (PLWH).
- Stigma, anxiety, and depression are prevalent among PLWH and are often linked to noncompliance with ART.
- The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is witnessing a rise in new HIV infections.
- However, there is a lack of research on mental health issues among PLWH in the MENA.

Our study aimed to assess the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stigma in a cohort of PLWH in Lebanon and explore potential correlations between these factors.

METHODS

- We conducted **a cross-sectional study** between June 2022 and June 2023 at a tertiary care center in Lebanon.
- The study included adult PLWH with an undetectable viral load for at least six months.
- We collected demographics and HIV-related data and used the **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) assessment, Patient-Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), and HIV Stigma Scale to measure anxiety, depression, and stigma, respectively.**

METHODS

- We employed statistical methods such as the Spearman correlation test, multiple regression, and descriptive analysis to characterize the cohort and examine the prevalence of and correlations between stigma, depression, and anxiety.
- Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

46.2% of PLWH have experienced anxiety, and ***61.5% have reported depression***.
The Spearman test revealed a ***significant positive correlation between anxiety and stigma*** (p<0.001, rho=0.665), as well as ***between depression and stigma*** (p=0.021, rho=0.400).

RESULTS

- Our analysis included 39 participants, with the majority being males (87.5%) and single (75%).
- The mean age was 38±9 years
- Mean GAD-7, PHQ-9, and stigma scores of 6±5.5, 6±4.7, and 25±9.5, respectively.
- Approximately 46.2% experienced anxiety (GAD-7 score>5), and 61.5% reported depression (PHQ-9 score>5).
- The Spearman test revealed a significant positive correlation between anxiety and stigma (p<0.001, rho=0.665), as well as between depression and stigma (p=0.021, rho=0.400).
- Notably, the correlation between anxiety and stigma remained significant even after adjusting for age (B= 4.3, p=0.033).

CONCLUSIONS

- In our cohort of PLWH, **we observed correlations between stigma, anxiety, and depression.**
- Furthermore, **anxiety and depression were found to be prevalent among the participants.**
- Considering the socio-cultural context of the MENA region, there is a pressing need for:
  - More extensive studies examining the intersection of HIV and mental health.
  - The development of tailored policies and strategies aimed at mitigating the escalating epidemic in this region.