



11 HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections

Chapter Summary

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), of all types, are a public health concern in the US and Canada. Two STIs of most concern are the incurable viruses, HIV/AIDS and herpes, which are now listed as chronic diseases. An estimated 33.3 to 36.7 million people worldwide are now living with HIV/AIDS. STIs are of psychological interest because they are transmitted largely through risky sexual behaviour, namely unprotected sex. The most vulnerable groups in Canada are men who have sex with men, injection drug users, street youth, and indigenous populations (PHAC, 2016a). Psychological factors such as personality traits, attitudes, and beliefs predict someone's susceptibility to engaging in risky behaviour. Age, lack of condom negotiation skills, and multiple partners are additional risk factors. Knowing how STIs are transmitted and the level of risk of contracting an STI from a given behaviour allows people to make informed choices about which sexual activities they feel comfortable performing.

Living with STIs and HIV has psychological consequences, such as poor mental health outcomes due to societal stigmatization and stress. Stress, known to reduce immune functions, is also a risk factor for progression of HIV to AIDS. The prevalence of some types of mental disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and substance-use disorders) is higher among people living with HIV than among the general population. Fortunately, health psychologists and other researchers and health providers operating within the biopsychosocial model have created psychological interventions that promote improved sexual health outcomes, reduce sexual risk behaviours, and help people living with STIs and especially people living with HIV to live longer and fuller lives.

Essay Topics

1. Why must HIV stigmatization be addressed? (pp. 243–244)
2. What are the different types of coping strategies employed by people living with HIV/AIDS? (p. 248)
3. Why is it important to study the factors that contribute to positive mental health and well-being among people living with HIV and other incurable STIs? (pp. 248, 251–254, 256)
4. How can the Internet be viewed as both a help to the management of HIV as well as a hindrance for the potential for contracting HIV? (pp. 252, 243)

Weblinks

<http://www.sieccan.org>

The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) website provides links to various sexuality organizations and resources, including a guide supporting the delivery of sexual health education in schools.

<http://www.aidslaw.ca>

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network website provides overviews and news items for a range of HIV/AIDS-related social concerns, including discrimination, technology, privacy, and sex work.

<http://www.avert.org>

The AVERT charity website provides a wealth of information on HIV prevention, symptoms, transmission, and testing, as well as the origins, strains, and lifecycle of HIV/AIDS.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/hiv-aids/surveillance-hiv-aids.html>

The *HIV and AIDS in Canada: Surveillance Report*, published by the Public Health Agency of Canada, is a synopsis of the state of HIV/AIDS in Canada based on provincial and territorial data.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/>

This section of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website outlines HIV/AIDS-related statistics, risk factors, and prevention research, and includes a detailed resource library.

Glossary

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) A disease that occurs when an HIV infected individual's immune system can no longer fight the virus. It can take up to 10 years to progress from HIV infection to AIDS.

Bacteria Single-celled microorganisms that can multiply given ideal environments. Antibiotic medications are most commonly used to treat bacterial infections.

Combination antiretroviral therapy (cART) A type of drug therapy in which a combination of multiple antiretroviral drugs is used to treat HIV and other retroviruses. This combination treatment is sometimes also known as Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART).

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) A virus that attacks the immune system, resulting in a chronic progressive illness that leaves individuals vulnerable to opportunistic infections and cancers.

Opportunistic infection An infection caused by pathogens that usually do not cause disease in a host with a healthy immune system, but can cause disease in an individual with a compromised immune system.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) Infections spread primarily through intimate person-to-person contact.

Viruses Submicroscopic organisms that require a host to survive—they can only reproduce by taking over the host cell's cellular machinery. Vaccines and antiviral medications aid in the treatment and prevention of viral infections.