



INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOURS ARE RISK FACTORS FOR SPEEDING THE PROGRESSION OF HIV DISEASE

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- Individuals infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) experience a gradual deterioration of their body's immune system and have difficulty fighting off other infections.
- The current treatment for HIV infection is highly-active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) which works by slowing or stopping this progression.
- We conducted this study of the scientific literature to find factors that speed or slow the course of HIV disease among people who use illicit drugs.
- We reviewed all English-language articles published in scientific journals from 1996 to 2010 that studied HIV disease progression among illicit drug users.
- We classified the risk factors by the measure of disease progression (i.e., death, development of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and by the type of risk factor (i.e., individual characteristic, behaviour, social circumstances, physical environment, etc.).

QUICK FACT

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OR BEHAVIOURS, SUCH AS ONGOING ILLICIT DRUG USE OR MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS, WERE FOUND TO BE RISK FACTORS FOR SPEEDING THE PROGRESSION OF HIV DISEASE.

FINDINGS

- We reviewed 4,122 scientific studies and found that 56 (2.1% of the total) matched all of our criteria for being included.
- Almost half of the studies (27 articles or 48%) were conducted among HIV-positive illicit drug users in the United States or Canada.
- Most studies (41 or 71% of the total) identified individual characteristics or behaviours as risk factors for disease progression, for example ongoing illicit drug use or mental health concerns.
- Fifteen studies (26% of the total) identified important aspects in the lives of HIV-positive drug users, for example incarceration or homelessness, that speed HIV disease progression.
- These aspects worsen HIV disease among drug users by complicating the delivery of HAART.

IMPLICATIONS

- In our study of the scientific literature, we found that most studies of HIV disease progression among drug users focused on individual characteristics and behaviours.
- A smaller proportion of studies looked at factors that have been found to be important for the health of drug users in other areas.
- Future research should continue to investigate how these sorts of social circumstances and environmental conditions affect the health of HIV-positive drug users.

Milloy M-J, Marshall B, Kerr T, Buxton J, Rhodes T, Montaner J, Wood E. **Social and structural factors associated with HIV disease progression among illicit drug users: A systematic review.** *AIDS*, 2012; 26(9): 1049-1063.