British Men With HIV Commit Suicide at Double the National Rate

The risk is particularly high the first year after receiving an HIV diagnosis.

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HIV-positive men in England and Wales commit suicide at a rate twice that of the general male population and have a particularly high rate the first year after being diagnosed with the virus, aidsmap reports.

Researchers studied a cohort of all 88,994 people diagnosed with HIV in the two British nations between 1997 and 2012 and linked the data with the Office of National Statistics' death data as well as death data from HIV physicians' offices. Findings were presented at the British HIV Association (BHIVA) conference in Liverpool.

By the end of the study period, 6 percent of the cohort (5,302 people) had died, for an all-cause death rate of 1.18 percent per year. This death rate was six times higher than that of the general population. Factors associated with a higher death rate were delays in three of the fundamental components of what is known as the HIV care continuum: HIV testing, being linked to medical care for the virus and receiving antiretroviral (ARV) treatment.

The major cause of death in the cohort was AIDS-defining illnesses (58 percent), which almost exclusively occurred among those diagnosed very late in the course of their HIV infection. Other causes of death were cancers (8 percent), cardiovascular disease or stroke (8 percent), infections (8 percent), liver disease (5 percent), substance misuse (3 percent) and suicide (2 percent).

Of the 96 deaths by suicide, 91 were among men; the rates were similar in gay and heterosexual men. The suicide rate among the HIV-positive men was 2.2 times greater than that of the general population. During the first year after diagnosis with HIV, men's overall suicide rate was 5.3 times greater than the general population; about 40 percent of the suicides in the HIV-positive cohort occurred during this time frame.

The researchers found no evidence that the suicide rate declined during the 15-year study period.

To read the aidsmap article, click here.

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