

Dyadic support exchange, affective well-being and HIV/AIDS stigma: A daily diary study of intimate couples of people living with HIV

June 2021 highlighted the 40th anniversary of the first cases of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection detected by the Centre for Disease Control, which resulted in a previously unknown disease, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Throughout this period, great progress in HIV treatment has changed HIV/AIDS from a terminal to a controllable chronic medical illness. Consequently, at present, the average life expectancy of people living with HIV (PLWH) does not significantly differ from the life expectancy of individuals without HIV infection. Despite these positive changes, people living with HIV still declare a lower level of well-being, not only compared to the general population but also compared to patients suffering from other somatic chronic diseases. Research results indicate that the reason for this paradoxical situation is the continuing stigmatization of people living with HIV, the external manifestations of which have changed over time, but the overall intensity has remained at a relatively similar level as during the initial period of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Though the explicit manifestations of such have been altered but its overall level remains rather similar to that at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Stigmatization related to HIV/AIDS is considered a major source of individual psychological distress and low well-being, but also from a global perspective, it is considered a key barrier to effectively combating the HIV epidemic worldwide.

Struggling with chronic illness poses high psychological distress not only for the patients but also for their close ones in the role of their informal caregivers. In such a situation, the mutual exchange of social support plays a key role in the functioning of both people, but research on everyday receiving and providing support in intimate relationships during illness is still rare. Providing support on a daily basis may be particularly important for patients because it may increase their sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem despite the disease, which is consistent with the general theory of social support enhancing self-esteem. The main aim of this project is to examine the relationships between subjectively evaluated daily provided and received social support, daily affective well-being and daily HIV/AIDS stigma in intimate couples among people living with HIV (PLWH).

To examine the mechanisms of social support exchange on fluctuations in daily affect and daily stigmatisation we plan to use innovative psychological measurement, namely dyadic intensive longitudinal measurement. Daily online measurements will include assessments of social support, stigma, and affective well-being for both partners forming the dyad, irrespective of their serodiscordant (one partner lives with HIV) or seroconcordant status (both partners live with HIV). Altogether, the online diary will take less than 7 minutes to complete and will take place for 3 weeks, each evening the participants in each dyad will fill online time-stamped questionnaires

To sum up, we want to underline the potential benefits associated with realising our research project which have both epistemological and social significance. First, our review of existing literature indicates that our study will be the first to examine social support exchange, affective well-being and HIV/AIDS stigma in the daily dyadic research design. Second, our project has solid theoretical background and as such may provide new knowledge in health and clinical psychology on the mechanisms of social support exchange in chronic illness. Third, we plan to co-operate with the "Positive in Rainbow" Union, i.e., the non-governmental organisation in Poland helping PLWH. This project will also be implemented under a cooperation agreement between the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Psychology of the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, which will also contribute to further strengthening the position of both units through high-quality scientific publications.