COMPLIMENTARY/ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AND PERCEIVED STRESS IN PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

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Abstract

The success of highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART) may lead to longer life for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLH) but can also contribute to the stress of being HIV+ with difficult protocols and numerous side effects. Many PLH choose alternative and complementary medicine (CAM) to help reduce the impact of HAART and ameliorate symptoms. By gaining a broader understanding of CAM users, important insight may be gained regarding some of the traits that differentiate them from those who do not choose those non-traditional methods for coping. This study examined the difference between CAM and non-CAM users’ total symptoms, dispositional optimism, pessimism and perceived stress as well as examined how symptom load and outcome expectancies might predict stress perceptions. Results suggest that CAM users differ significantly from non-CAM users on these variables. In addition, these differences predict a significant amount of variance in stress perception. An increased understanding of the factors that are related to lower stress perception, including CAM use, may be useful in increasing the efficacy of stress management interventions for PLH.

Biopsychosocial Factors and Stress

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is a complex interaction between the stressor and a multitude of factors including outcome expectations and coping strategies. Symptoms – Symptom load and symptom appraisal both contribute to the adjustment of living with HIV (Bova, 2001).

Optimism and Pessimism – PLH who report a more optimistic outlook are more likely to focus on coping resources and less likely to focus on threats associated with HIV (Anderson, 2000).

CAM – Up to 84% of PLH use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) to help manage their HIV. Also, CAM users interpret their HIV as more manageable and engage in more active coping styles (Gore-Felton, 2003; Knippeles & Weiss, 2000; Sparber, 2000; Suarez & Reese, 2000).

Hypotheses

- Based on current research and Lazarus & Folkman’s (1984) model of cognitive appraisal and stress, we hypothesized for PLH:
  - CAM use will be associated with lower perceived stress.
  - Fewer symptoms will be associated with lower perceived stress.
  - Higher optimism will be associated with lower perceived stress.
  - Lower pessimism will be associated with lower perceived stress.

Methods

This survey-based study used a cross-sectional correlational design.

Participants

Demographics N = 80; gender balanced

- Under $10,000 = 66
- Over $10,000 = 14

Income Level

- Age Under 30 n = 28
- 30 - 39 n = 20
- 40 - 49 n = 18
- 50 Over n = 18

Ethnicity

- African American, n = 47
- Caucasian, n = 29
- Hispanic, n = 4

Medical Variables

- Yes, n = 38
- No, n = 42

AIDS Diagnosis

- Current HAART Use

CAM vs. Non-CAM Users

Please indicate which of the following symptoms you have experienced...

Correlates

1. Sex
2. African American
3. Latino
4. Symptom Quantity
5. CAM Use
6. Optimism
7. Pessimism

Multiple Regression

PREDICTOR VARIABLES

- Sex
- African American
- Latino
- Symptom Quantity
- CAM Use
- Optimism
- Pessimism

DEPENDANT VARIABLE

- Perceived Stress

Analysis

Biopsychosocial Measures

HIV Symptom Checklist

- Staff-Clinic Coordinating Center

Extended Life Orientation Test - Optimism Sub-Scale

Cohen et al., 1983

Extended Life Orientation Test - Pessimism Sub-Scale

Cohen et al., 1983

Perceived Stress Scale

Cohen et al., 1983

Conclusions

- Our model explains 35% of the variance in perceived stress in PLH.
- These findings support the Lazarus & Folkman (1984) theory whereby a variety of mediating processes impact stress perceptions.
- Symptom treatment; CAM use and positive outcome expectancies may be the potential to be successful components for stress management interventions.

Future Research

- Although dispositional optimism might protect PLH from perceived stress, long term effects on stress responses should be explored further (Cotter et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 1992; Tomakowsky, et al., 2001).
- Components for stress management interventions should be explored to determine their unique function; interactions and benefits for different populations of PLH (Antoni, 2003).
- The relationship between optimistic and pessimistic explanatory styles should be investigated (Cheng et al., 1997).
- Gain a better understanding of CAM users and of the role CAM use as a mediating variable in the stress process.

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Selected References


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