Pain Is Common Among People With HIV, Drags on Quality of Life

This is according to a survey of people living with HIV in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

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People living with well-treated HIV frequently suffer from physical pain, which is associated with compromised quality of life and lack of employment.

Publishing their findings in the journal AIDS, researchers recruited HIV-positive people at seven sites in the United Kingdom and Ireland between 2013 and 2016 and had them complete questionnaires. They enrolled 676 people with HIV age 50 years old and older (referred to as "older"), 357 people with HIV younger than 50 ("younger") and 295 HIV-negative people age 50 and older ("older controls").

Ninety-eight percent of the people with HIV were on antiretrovirals and 90 percent of the overall group had a fully suppressed viral load. The median CD4 count among them was 626 (above 500 is considered optimal).

Forty-four percent of the participants reported current pain, including 49 percent of the older people with HIV, 38 percent of the younger people with HIV and 40 percent of the older controls. Compared with the older people with HIV, those in the other two groups were about one third less likely to report current pain.

Two thirds of the participants reported pain during the past month, including 70 percent of the older and 63 percent of the younger people with HIV and 64 percent of the controls. Compared with the older people with HIV, the younger people with HIV and the controls were between 26 percent and 28 percent less likely to report pain during the previous month.

People reporting pain during the current month were more likely to be female, heterosexual and Black.

Fourteen percent of those reporting pain said they had missed days of work due to such symptoms, including 19 percent of the older people and 12 percent of the younger people with HIV and 8 percent of the controls. About one third of those who reported current pain were unemployed or on sick leave, compared with a rate about half that among those not currently in pain.

Nearly all quality-of-life indicators were poorer among people with HIV who reported pain, including rates of depression.

To read a POZ feature article on chronic pain among people with HIV, click here.

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