

Role of Community Camps in Building Resilience among People Living with HIV/AIDS

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Abstract

Community-based psycho-social interventions play a crucial role in strengthening resilience and improving the quality of life among People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV). Despite advancements in medical treatment, PLHIV continue to experience stigma, social exclusion, and psychological distress, highlighting the need for holistic and community-driven approaches. Community camps have emerged as effective collective platforms that promote empowerment, emotional well-being, and social integration.

This study examines the role of community camps in building resilience among PLHIV using a qualitative research design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with participants who attended such camps and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that community camps serve as safe and inclusive spaces that provide emotional and psychosocial support, reduce stigma, foster social cohesion, and facilitate the development of shared coping strategies. Participation in these camps enhances self-esteem, promotes empowerment, and strengthens adaptive capacities.

The study underscores the importance of community camps as sustainable psycho-social interventions and recommends their expansion across diverse socio-cultural contexts to improve resilience and overall well-being among PLHIV.

Keywords: Community Camps; Resilience; People Living with HIV/AIDS; Psycho-social Intervention; Social Support

Introduction

HIV/AIDS continues to be a major global public health challenge, affecting millions of individuals across diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts. Despite significant advancements in antiretroviral therapy (ART), which have transformed HIV from a fatal disease into a manageable chronic condition, People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) still encounter multiple non-medical challenges that deeply affect their overall well-being. These challenges are not only physical but also psychological, social, and economic in nature.

One of the most persistent issues faced by PLHIV is stigma and discrimination, which operate at individual, community, and institutional levels. HIV-related stigma often leads to social exclusion, loss of employment opportunities, breakdown of family relationships, and reduced access to healthcare services. Many individuals internalize this stigma, resulting in feelings of shame, fear, anxiety, and depression. Such psychosocial stressors negatively influence treatment adherence, mental health outcomes, and quality of life.

Traditional approaches to HIV/AIDS intervention have primarily focused on biomedical aspects such as diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. While these interventions are essential, they often fail to address the emotional and social dimensions of living with HIV. Increasingly, there is recognition that a holistic and community-centered approach is necessary to effectively support PLHIV. This shift has led to the development of community-based interventions that emphasize participation, inclusion, and empowerment.

Among these interventions, community camps have emerged as a promising strategy for addressing the psychosocial needs of PLHIV. These camps function as safe, inclusive, and supportive environments where individuals can openly share their experiences without fear of judgment or discrimination. They provide opportunities for peer interaction, emotional expression, and collective learning, which are crucial for building resilience.

Resilience, in the context of HIV/AIDS, refers to the ability of individuals to adapt positively and maintain well-being despite facing adversity. Community camps play a significant role in fostering resilience by strengthening social support networks, enhancing coping mechanisms, and promoting a sense of belonging. Through group activities, counseling sessions, and participatory learning, participants develop skills that enable them to manage stress, adhere to treatment, and rebuild their self-esteem.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the role of community camps in building resilience among PLHIV. By focusing on participants' lived experiences, the study aims to provide deeper insights into how these camps influence emotional well-being, social relationships, and coping capacities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for strengthening community-based interventions and promoting inclusive, holistic care for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing discourse on community-based interventions in HIV/AIDS care by highlighting the role of community camps as sustainable psycho-social support systems. It moves beyond individual-centric approaches and emphasizes the importance of collective and relational processes in building resilience.

The study offers practical insights for social work practice by identifying key components of effective community camps, including peer support, emotional engagement, and participatory learning. It also holds policy relevance by advocating for the integration of community camps into existing HIV/AIDS programs.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the need to address stigma and social exclusion through community-driven initiatives, thereby promoting inclusion, empowerment, and improved quality of life among PLHIV.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that draws upon Resilience Theory, Social Support Theory, and Empowerment Theory to understand the role of community camps in enhancing well-being among PLHIV.

Resilience Theory conceptualizes resilience as the ability of individuals to adapt positively in the face of adversity. Community camps provide supportive environments that strengthen adaptive capacities and coping mechanisms.

Social Support Theory emphasizes the importance of emotional, informational, and instrumental support. Community camps facilitate peer interactions and shared learning.

Empowerment Theory focuses on enabling individuals to gain control over their lives. Community camps foster self-confidence, agency, and empowerment among PLHIV.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore in depth the lived experiences of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) who have participated in community camps. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate as it enables a comprehensive understanding of subjective experiences, emotional responses, and social interactions that cannot be effectively captured through quantitative methods.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who had actively attended community camps and were willing to share their experiences. The sample included individuals from diverse socio-economic and demographic backgrounds to ensure a broader representation of perspectives. The inclusion criteria focused on PLHIV who had participated in at least one community camp and were able to provide informed insights into their experiences.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDI), which allowed participants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences in a safe and supportive environment. A semi-structured interview guide was used to maintain consistency while allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes. The interview guide included questions related to emotional well-being, stigma, social relationships, coping strategies, and the perceived impact of community camps on their lives.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that community camps play a significant and multifaceted role in building resilience among People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV). The discussion below elaborates on the key themes that emerged from the data and links them with relevant theoretical perspectives.

1. Emotional and Psycho-social Support:

One of the most prominent findings was the emotional comfort experienced by participants. Community camps provided a safe and non-judgmental space where individuals felt accepted and valued. Many participants reported a reduction in feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression after attending the camps. This aligns with Social Support Theory, which emphasizes the importance of emotional support

in improving mental health and resilience.

2. Reduction of Stigma and Social Isolation:

Participants highlighted that community camps helped in reducing both external stigma from society and internalized stigma. Interacting with others facing similar challenges enabled them to normalize their experiences and overcome feelings of shame and self-blame. The collective environment of the camps played a crucial role in breaking social isolation and fostering acceptance.

3. Promotion of Social Cohesion:

The camps encouraged the development of strong inter personal relationships among participants. Many individuals formed meaningful connections and support networks that extended beyond the camp setting. This sense of belonging and shared identity strengthened their emotional resilience and provided a reliable support system in times of need.

4. Development of Coping Strategies:

Community camps served as platforms for knowledge sharing and collective learning. Participants exchanged experiences and strategies for managing their health, adhering to treatment, and dealing with social challenges. Exposure to diverse coping mechanisms enhanced their ability to handle stress and adversity effectively.

5. Enhancement of Self-esteem and Empowerment:

Participation in community camps significantly improved participants' self-confidence and sense of self-worth. Activities such as group discussions, role plays, and peer interactions enabled individuals to express themselves freely and develop a positive self-image. This reflects the principles of Empowerment Theory, where individuals gain control over their lives through participation and collective engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Community camps are effective psycho-social interventions that significantly enhance resilience among PLHIV.

Recommendations include expanding camps, integrating them into HIV programs, training facilitators, and conducting further research to evaluate long-term impacts.

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