

research snapshot

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Canada's HIV positive youth desperately lack services and social support.

What is this research about?

There are over 13,000 youth and young adults that have tested positive for HIV in Canada. Being HIV positive makes youth a particularly vulnerable population. HIV positive youth experience higher than usual rates of homelessness, sexual and physical abuse, financial difficulties, addictions, and social isolation. Despite this troubling reality, there has been little effort to look at what can be done to better support Canadian HIV positive youth.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher interviewed and surveyed a total of 34 HIV positive youth. The questions focused on challenges the youth experience due to their condition and how they feel these challenges can be helped through services and assistance. A panel of stakeholders which included university researchers, supporting professionals, and HIV positive youth prepared the questions and analyzed the results.

What did the researcher find?

Researchers found that HIV positive youth had three areas in their lives where they felt they needed support:

What you need to know:

Young people living with HIV need greater support to minimize the barriers to their full participation in society.

Personal feelings about HIV- many youth expressed regret, shame, and guilt over the behaviours that led to them being infected with HIV. Some felt their HIV diagnosis was empowering and gave them a “new lease on life”. Other youth who were infected through their parents felt HIV was a smaller part of their life.

Barriers to full participation in society - the youth talked about experiencing harassment, abuse, discrimination, and / or cruelty when they disclose their condition to their loved ones or someone in a position of power.

Support Networks – most HIV positive youth were able to turn to family for support. Others who had strained relations with family turned to friends and partners for support. While most youth were found to be using at least one support service, they had a number of issues when receiving assistance. Some youth reported that AIDS Service Organizations were not very “youth friendly”.

Youth listed the following services they felt would help them deal with their condition:

- Safe spaces to be “out” about having HIV
- Peer-based services
- Financial support services
- Housing Support
- Recreational programming
- Food security
- Educational Support
- Counseling Services
- Information Sessions
- Referrals to appropriate services
- Treatment decision-making resources.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers, community groups, and service providers will find this research useful in developing more targeted programs and services that help HIV positive youth. This research provides a list of specific services that the youth themselves feel would help them better manage their condition. This research will also help with the development of programs that could prevent further spread of HIV among Canadian youth.

About the Researcher

Sarah Flicker is an Assistant Professor with York University’s Faculty of Environmental Studies. This Research Snapshot is from her project, “Falling Through the Cracks of the Big Cities: Who is Meeting the Needs of HIV-positive Youth?”. It is published in *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 96:4 (2005): 308-312.

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