

Abstract

BACKGROUND:

Most available studies on the psychiatric, neuropsychological, and neurological complications of HIV-1 infection and AIDS have been conducted in Western countries, on samples of well-educated, mostly white, homosexual men. Concerns about generalizability of the results of those investigations prompted the WHO to implement the cross-cultural venture called WHO Neuropsychiatric AIDS study.

METHODS:

This project aims to assess the prevalence and natural history of HIV-1-associated psychiatric, neuropsychological, and neurological abnormalities in representative subject samples enrolled in the five geographic areas predominantly affected by the HIV-1 epidemic. Assessment is made by a data collection instrument including six modules. The intercenter and intracenter reliability in the use of each module has been formally evaluated. The study consists of a cross-sectional phase and a longitudinal follow-up.

RESULTS:

The cross-sectional phase was completed in five centers. This paper reports on the results of psychiatric assessment, which revealed a significantly higher prevalence of current mental disorders in symptomatic seropositive persons compared with seronegative controls among intravenous drug users in Bangkok and homosexuals/bisexuals in São Paulo. The mean global score on the Montgomery-Asberg Depression Rating Scale was significantly higher in symptomatic seropositive individuals than in matched seronegative controls in all centers.

CONCLUSIONS:

These results suggest that the significance of the psychopathological complications of symptomatic HIV-1 infection may have been underestimated by previous studies conducted on self-selected samples of well-educated, middle-class, mostly white, homosexual men.