

Need for HIV/AIDS Early Identification and Preventive Measures Among Middle-Aged and Elderly Women

Middle-aged and elderly women with HIV/AIDS are a hidden population that need early identification and access to care. The growing number of women 50 years and older with HIV/AIDS is a major public health concern.¹⁻⁴ It is important that the attention of health care providers be directed to the changing profile of middle-aged and elderly women with HIV/AIDS.⁵⁻⁸

To study the changes in the profile of this population, we examined population-based surveillance data for women 50 years and older who were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS through December 1998 and were reported to the California AIDS Registry as of May 1999. The total number of cases was 1010, which accounted for 13% of all female cases reported during the study period. We examined the distribution of these cases in terms of mode of exposure (injection drug use, heterosexual, transfusion, and not identified) and race/ethnicity (White, African American, Latina, and Asian/Pacific Islander) for the diagnosis periods before 1990 (23%) and 1990 and after (77%). We also partitioned the data by the age groups 50 to 59 years (59%) and 60 years and older (41%) to study their similarities and differences in terms of mode of exposure and race/ethnicity.

Figure 1a and b present the percentage of female AIDS cases by mode of exposure for the 2 age groups. The graphs show a major shift in the distribution of cases from transfusion to other modes of exposure, especially to the heterosexual category. In 1990 and after, more than 50% of the cases were through heterosexual exposure. A similar

analysis was performed to compare the distribution of cases among different racial/ethnic groups for the 2 diagnosis periods (Figure 1c and d). The results indicate that a higher percentage of cases diagnosed in 1990 and after were non-White. Contingency table analyses of mode of exposure and race/ethnicity showed

that the differences in the distribution of cases before 1990 and in 1990 and after were statistically significant for each age group ($P < .001$).

The higher number of cases in 1990 and after, especially among heterosexuals, injection drug users, and non-Whites, underscores the necessity of physicians' continued atten-

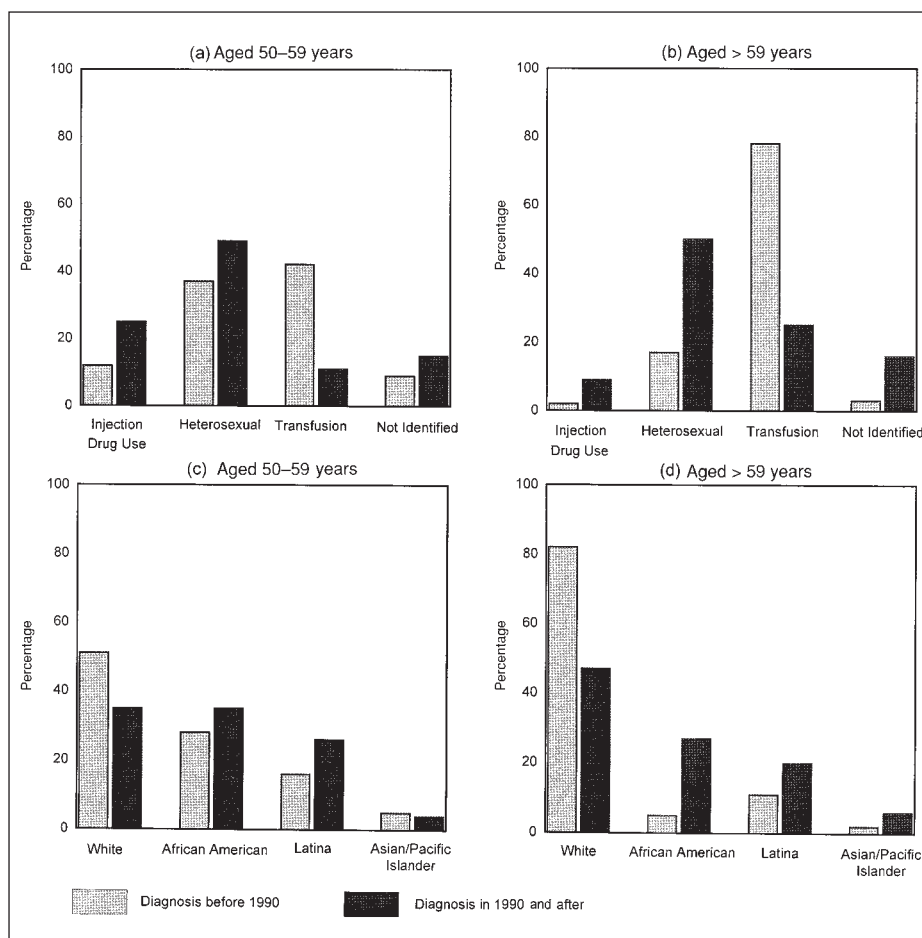


FIGURE 1—Distribution of AIDS among women aged 50-59 years and 60 years and older diagnosed through December 1998 and reported as of May 1999, by mode of exposure (a and b) and race/ethnicity (c and d) for the diagnosis periods before 1990 and in 1990 and after.

tion to early identification of symptoms of HIV infection in these groups. The findings of the study highlight the importance of appropriate strategies to respond to the special needs of middle-aged and elderly women to ensure prevention, early identification, and access to care and treatment. □

Farzaneh Tabnak, PhD
Richard Sun, MD, MPH

The authors are with the HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Branch, Office of AIDS, California Department of Health Services, Sacramento.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Farzaneh Tabnak, PhD, HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Branch, Office of AIDS, California Department of

Health Services, PO Box 942732, Sacramento, CA 94234-7320 (e-mail: ftabnak@dhs.ca.gov).

Contributors

F. Tabnak was responsible for the design, conduct, and interpretation of the study, including writing the paper. R. Sun contributed to the conception of the study and writing the paper.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. AIDS among persons aged 50 years—United States, 1991–1996. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 1998;47:21–27.
2. Gaeta TJ, LaPolla C, Melendez E. AIDS in the elderly: New York City vital statistics. *J Emerg Med.* 1996;14:19–23.
3. Finestone AJ. Considering AIDS in the elderly. *Pa Med.* 1993;96:26–27.
4. Wallace JI, Paauw DS, Spach DH. HIV infection in older patients: when to suspect the unexpected. *Geriatrics.* 1993;48:61–64, 69–70.
5. Chen HX, Ryan PA, Ferguson RP, Yataco A, Makowitz JA, Raksis K. Characteristics of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome in older adults. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 1998;46:153–156.
6. Schable B, Chu SY, Diaz T. Characteristics of women 50 years of age or older with heterosexually acquired AIDS. *Am J Public Health.* 1996;86:1616–1618.
7. Wutoh AK, Hidalgo J, Rhee W, Bareta J. A characterization of older AIDS patients in Maryland. *J Natl Med Assoc.* 1998;90:369–373.
8. Stall R, Catania J. AIDS risk behaviors among late middle-aged and elderly Americans. The National AIDS Behavioral Surveys. *Arch Intern Med.* 1994;154:57–63.