

A CLOSER LOOK AT PERCEPTIONS OF HIV IN HARD HIT AREAS

OVERVIEW

Over the thirty years since AIDS was first identified, there have been numerous gains and setbacks as the fight against the disease has progressed. The years have seen advances in prevention and medical treatments that have improved the lives of those living with the disease, but significant challenges remain. The number of new infections continues to increase among some groups¹ and one in five infected with HIV are unaware of their status.² The impact of AIDS has not been uniform, however, and some communities and parts of the country have been harder hit than other areas. Specifically, those living in urban areas, racial and ethnic minorities, and gay and bisexual men are most disproportionately affected by the disease.

In July 2010, the Obama Administration announced the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS), the first comprehensive strategy for combating the domestic epidemic. The effort seeks to reduce the number of new infections, increase access to care for those living with HIV, and reduce HIV-related health disparities.³ To support the strategy, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched the “12 cities project” in October 2010 to focus on coordinating and enhancing HIV prevention, care, and treatment services in twelve metropolitan areas with high HIV/AIDS burden. The areas covered by this specific HHS project represent 44 percent of the nation’s AIDS cases and include New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, Washington DC, Miami, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta and San Juan, Puerto Rico.⁴

In June of this year, the Kaiser Family Foundation released its eighth major survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS to examine national public opinion toward HIV/AIDS.⁵ Here we use data from this survey to examine HIV-related attitudes and perceptions among the group of adults living in these hard hit metropolitan areas, and how their views compare with those of people living in other areas of the country. We recognize that the local communities with higher HIV/AIDS burden are often much smaller areas within these much larger metropolitan boundaries. However, it is our hope that shedding light on the public opinion environment in these broad areas might help federal, state, and city efforts to prevent and treat HIV in the highly affected areas within these large urban areas.

These high HIV burden metropolitan areas, while different from one another and each comprised of diverse populations, are analyzed in aggregate, as sample size limits individual analysis of specific areas.⁶ Americans living in these areas are more likely to be black or Latino and are more likely to have completed college and have higher incomes, a reflection of the urban environments that make up these areas (see Appendix). Because HIV experiences and attitudes differ by race at the national level, we also examine the attitudes and perceptions of HIV by race within the hard hit areas. The responses of blacks, Latinos, and whites living in harder hit communities generally mirror the national findings, with concern being most widespread among black adults. In some cases, however, concern is greater among Latino and white adults living in hard hit areas, than seen among Latinos and whites living in other areas of the country.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “HIV Incidence,” August 2011. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/incidence.htm>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Fact Sheet, “HIV in the United States,” July 2010. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/us.htm>

³ White House Office of National AIDS Policy, “National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States,” June 2010. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/NHAS.pdf>

⁴ AIDS.gov. *The 12 Cities Project* February 2011. <http://blog.aids.gov/wp-content/uploads/NHAS-HHS-12.pdf>

⁵ Kaiser Family Foundation, “HIV/AIDS at 30: A Public Opinion Perspective” June 2011. <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8186.cfm>

⁶ The areas are defined using metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), which includes the city proper and surrounding counties with close economic ties to the city. For example, the Los Angeles MSA includes all of Los Angeles and Orange Counties. San Juan, Puerto Rico was not included in the KFF survey.

KEY FINDINGS

Urgency about HIV/AIDS at the National and Community Levels

One in 10 adults living in these hard hit areas name HIV/AIDS as the nation’s most urgent health problem, twice the proportion as among those living in other areas of the country (5 percent), but still a modest share. Higher shares say AIDS is a serious problem, with roughly half of people living in these hard hit communities saying that AIDS is a serious problem for people they know, which is significantly higher than among people living in other parts of the country (38 percent). One in five say the problem of AIDS in their community is more urgent than it was a few years ago. Compared to those living outside the high burden areas, those in harder hit communities are slightly less likely to say that AIDS has never been a problem in their community (24 percent compared with 31 percent). And, within these harder hit areas, blacks and Latinos are roughly twice as likely as whites to say the problem of AIDS is more urgent now than it was a few years ago or that AIDS is a serious problem for people they know, a pattern that is consistent with national results.⁷

PERCEPTIONS OF HIV/AIDS AS A NATIONAL/LOCAL PROBLEM BY AREA AND RACE					
Percent who...	Hard Hit Areas	Other areas	Hard Hit Areas		
			Black	Latino	White
Name HIV/AIDS as the most urgent health problem facing the nation	10% ^a	5%	16%	10%	9%
Compared to a few years ago, say AIDS ...					
Is a more urgent problem in their community	20	17	30 ^w	29 ^w	15
Is a less urgent problem in their community	17	14	13	12	20
Is about the same	32	29	33	28	33
Has never been a problem in their community	24 ^a	31	17	26	23
Say AIDS is a serious problem for people they know	48 ^a	38	57 ^w	69 ^w	35

^a Statistically significant from Other Areas (p<0.05)

^w Statistically significant from whites (p<0.05)

Proximity to Disease, Concern about Infection

Overall, 45 percent of people living in the hard hit metropolitan areas, and six in ten among blacks (62 percent), report knowing someone with HIV/AIDS, similar to the shares who report this nationally. About a third (36 percent) of people in these areas say they are personally concerned about becoming infected with HIV. Concern about contracting the disease is most widespread in the black and Latino communities with about half of blacks (53 percent) and Latinos (56 percent) in high burden areas saying they are personally concerned about becoming infected. Concern rises considerably among parents in these areas, where close to two-thirds say they are worried that a son or daughter will become infected. Not surprisingly given the relatively higher impact of HIV/AIDS in these metropolitan areas, concern is generally more widespread in these areas than it is in other parts of the country.

⁷ The differences between hard hit areas and other areas of the country reported here do not just reflect differences between urban, suburban, and rural communities. When urban/suburban areas that are not part of the 12 cities project are compared with the urban/suburban hard hit areas, these differences still exist.

Visibility of HIV/AIDS

The visibility of HIV/AIDS is somewhat higher among those living in these harder hit metropolitan areas than in other areas, with almost one-half of adults living in these communities saying they have seen, heard, or read “a lot” or “some” about the problem of AIDS in the US in the past year, compared with 38 percent of adults elsewhere in America. Substantial shares of adults in high burden areas report seeing or hearing a public service announcement related to HIV in the past year on television (60 percent), on billboards or other outdoor advertising (45 percent), on the radio (35 percent) or the internet (29 percent). Despite this visibility in the public sphere, HIV is not frequently a topic of conversation with family and friends. Just shy of a quarter (24 percent) of people in hard hit areas say that the subject of AIDS comes up in conversations with family and friends at least sometimes. As they are nationally, both blacks (43 percent) and Latinos (30 percent) in hard hit areas are more likely than whites (15 percent) to report talking with family and friends about AIDS at least occasionally.

REPORTED PERSONAL CONNECTIONS TO THE DISEASE AND CONCERN ABOUT BECOMING INFECTED BY AREA AND RACE					
Percent who...	Hard Hit Areas	Other Areas	Hard Hit Areas		
			Black	Latino	White
Know someone who has AIDS, has died from AIDS, or has tested positive for HIV	45%	40%	62% ^{l,w}	41%	41%
Are personally concerned about becoming infected with HIV	36 ^a	30	53 ^w	56 ^w	22
Are concerned about an immediate family member becoming infected with HIV	50	44	72 ^w	64 ^w	35
Are concerned about a son or daughter becoming infected with HIV (among parents)	64 ^a	55	^	72 ^w	49
Say the subject of HIV/AIDS comes up often/sometimes with family and friends	24	23	43 ^w	30 ^w	15
Say they have seen, heard, read a lot/some about the problem of AIDS in the US in the past year	45 ^a	38	53	46	42

^a Statistically significant from Other Areas (p<0.05)

^w Statistically significant from whites (p<0.05)

^l Statistically significant from Latinos (p<0.05)

[^] There are too few interviews to present data for black parents in hard hit areas.

Reported HIV Testing Rates

HIV testing is an important component to strategies aimed at slowing the spread of the disease and providing treatment for those already infected, and this is particularly true in areas where HIV/AIDS burden is higher. According to the survey, six in ten adults under age 65 living in these areas say they have been tested for HIV at some point, including 25 percent who say they have been tested within the past 12 months. The share of people who report having been tested is higher in the harder hit areas than in other parts of the country, where closer to half (52 percent) of the non-elderly report having ever been tested, a positive finding for prevention and treatment efforts.

Looking at differences in testing across racial/ethnic groups, blacks are much more likely to report being tested for HIV than Latinos or whites regardless of where they live. Seventy-nine percent of blacks under age 65 in harder hit areas say they have ever been tested for HIV, including 46 percent who say they have been tested in the past 12 months. For nonelderly Latinos and whites in hard hit metropolitan areas, closer to six in ten say they have ever been tested.

Conversations about Testing

Among those under 65 years old in these high burden areas, close to six in ten (57 percent) say they have ever talked with a spouse or partner about HIV, a higher share than among those living in other parts of the country (48 percent). Further, close to five in ten non-elderly adults in these areas say they have talked about HIV/AIDS with a doctor (47 percent).

REPORTED TESTING AND COMMUNICATION WITH PROVIDERS AMONG ADULTS 18-64 BY AREA AND RACE					
Percent under age 65 who...	Hard Hit Areas	Other Areas	Hard Hit Areas		
			Black	Latino	White
Report ever getting an HIV test	61 ^a	52	79% ^{l,w}	61%	58%
Report being tested in the past 12 months	25	20	46% ^{l,w}	25	19
Say they have ever talked with a partner or spouse about HIV/AIDS	57 ^a	48	73% ^{l,w}	57	53
Say they have ever talked with a doctor or health care provider about HIV/AIDS	47	44	71% ^{l,w}	47	39

^a Statistically significant from Other Areas (p<0.05)

^w Statistically significant from whites (p<0.05)

^l Statistically significant from Latinos (p<0.05)

Comparing Hard Hit Areas to Other Areas Within Racial/Ethnic Groups

For the most part, the attitudes and perceptions of blacks, Latinos and whites in hard hit areas are similar to their peers in areas not carrying such a large HIV burden, although there are a few areas where opinions diverge. For example, whites in high burden areas are more likely than whites in other areas to name HIV/AIDS as the most urgent health problem facing the nation (9 percent vs. 3 percent) and are less likely to say that AIDS has never been a problem in their community (23 percent vs. 34 percent). Nonelderly whites in harder hit areas are also more likely than whites in other areas to say they have ever been tested for HIV (58 percent vs. 47 percent) and to report talking with a partner about the disease (53 percent vs. 44 percent). Latinos in these areas are more likely to say AIDS is a serious problem for people they know than Latinos living in other areas (69 percent vs. 57 percent) and are more likely to express concern about personally becoming infected (56 percent vs. 42 percent) or having a son or daughter contract the disease (72 percent vs. 58 percent). Blacks generally respond with higher reported levels of concern regardless of where they live.

SELECTED FINDINGS COMPARING HARD HIT AREAS TO OTHER AREAS BY RACE						
Percent who...	Black		Latino		White	
	Hard Hit Areas	Other Areas	Hard Hit Areas	Other Areas	Hard Hit Areas	Other Areas
Name HIV/AIDS as the most urgent health problem facing the nation	16%	20%	10%	7%	9% ^w	3%
Say AIDS has <i>never</i> been a problem in their community	17	18	26	23	23 ^w	34
Say AIDS is a serious problem for people they know	57	59	69 ^l	57	35	31
Know someone who has AIDS, has died from AIDS, or has tested positive for HIV	62	53	41	34	41	38
Are personally concerned about becoming infected with HIV	53	58	56 ^l	42	22	23
Are concerned about a son or daughter becoming infected with HIV (among parents)	^	^	72 ^l	58	49	47
Report ever getting an HIV test (among nonelderly)	79	75	61	55	58 ^w	47
Say they have ever talked with a partner or spouse about HIV/AIDS (among nonelderly)	73	69	57	49	53 ^w	44

^l Statistically significant from Latinos living in other areas (p<0.05)

^w Statistically significant from whites living in other areas (p<0.05)

^b Statistically significant from blacks living in other areas (p<0.05)

^ There are too few interviews to present data for black parents in hard hit areas.

CONCLUSION

While HIV-related opinions and experiences in the hard-hit metropolitan areas targeted by the 12 cities project are similar to those in other parts of the country in many ways, a few differences stand out. Overall, those in harder hit areas are more likely to name AIDS as an urgent national health problem, to say it is a serious problem for their community, and to report hearing about the problem in the media. In these areas we also find higher shares reporting getting tested for HIV, an important finding because when people know if they are HIV-positive they are likely to adopt behaviors that prevent the spread of the disease and can be connected with treatment.⁸ In terms of members of different racial/ethnic groups, many of the patterns identified in the national survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS are mirrored when we focus on those living in the metropolitan areas that have been harder hit by HIV. For example, as they are nationally, blacks report higher levels of concern and are more likely to be worried about how AIDS affects their communities than whites. In some areas, concern about the disease is elevated among Latinos within hard hit communities, particularly in reporting that AIDS is a serious problem in the community or being personally concerned about becoming infected. Understanding public opinion on HIV/AIDS in these jurisdictions may help inform implementation of interventions in these high burden areas that are part of the HHS response to the NHAS.

APPENDIX: SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS BY AREA		
	Hard Hit Areas	Other Areas
Sex		
Female	50%	50%
Male	50	50
Age		
18-29	24	24
30-49	38	34
50-64	23	26
65 or older	15	15
Community Type		
Urban	42*	32
Suburban	55*	43
Rural	-	19
Race/Ethnicity		
Black	18*	11
Latino	23*	12
White	51*	70
Education		
High School or Less	45	49
Some College	26	28
College Graduate or More	29*	23
Annual Household Income		
Less than \$50,000	50*	56
\$50,000 or more	38*	33

* Statistically significant from Other Areas (p<0.05)

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "CDC HIV/AIDS Science Facts: CDC Releases Revised HIV Testing Recommendations in Healthcare Settings," September 2006. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/testing/resources/factsheets/healthcare.htm>

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