

HIV positive and sexually traumatized migrants in Switzerland

Main issues, difficulties, counselling
and supporting possibilities

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Main Issues

1. HIV and stigmatization
2. Migration
3. Sexual violence

HIV and stigmatization

- stigmatization and ostracism because of HIV
- difficult life circumstances aggravated by illness and health problems
- Fear that family or friends could learn about their infection

➔ Consequences

- fear of negative reaction leads to isolation and solitude
- late testing and late begin of therapy (late presenters)
- multiple discrimination

Migration

Forced migration is defined by 3 characteristics:

- emigration due to political, ethical, social prosecution or poverty
- illegal and often dangerous escape
- insecure residence permit status

Transnational migration:

- foreign language and culture; new value system; different social and legal system

Migration

Frequent consequences of forced and transnational migration:

- extreme social and emotional stress and physical and sexual violence during the escape and afterwards
→ trauma and psychiatric problems
- Lack of integration (accommodation, work, finances)
→ poor mental and living conditions

Sexual violence

- Sexual violence is a traumatic experience and can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- long-term consequences: angst, flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia, solitude, identity problems, sexual problems, depression, addictions, psychosomatic pain, suicidal tendency, etc.
- need of mental and social stabilization
- trauma treatment: psychotherapy, medication, social support
- therapy's aim is: reducing the negative emotions which are related to the trauma, restoring a feeling of security and control in the personal environment

Difficulties for HIV positive and sexually traumatized migrants in Switzerland

1. Residence status
2. Personal difficulties
3. Trauma therapy

Difficulties concerning the law of residence

- Legal principles, HIV as a reason for a residence permit
- Different residence permits in Switzerland with different possibilities of integration
- Long and exigent asylum procedure = insecure living conditions
- HIV as reason to get a permit: stage of the illness (AIDS), availability of treatment and social integration in the country of origin

Difficulties concerning the law of residence

- Living conditions during the asylum procedure
 - Accommodation: living in big asylum centers without privacy
 - Medical supply: no free choice of doctor, voucher system
 - Day structure: low possibilities of activity, employment and education

Personal difficulties

- Coping with the HIV diagnosis
 - Difficulties to integrate the disease in life, fear of stigmatization, different knowledge and attitudes towards HIV, anxiety about future
- Dealing with the trauma
 - Low resilience and coping strategies, lack of social support, insecure living conditions
- Sexuality and family planning
 - Problems with relationships and having a safe and satisfying sexuality, lower chances of finding a partner and having a family

Difficulties concerning trauma therapy

- Therapeutic treatment during the asylum procedure
 - insecure perspective
 - linguistic and cultural difficulties
- Requirements for trauma therapy
 - safe living-conditions, mental stability
 - social support
 - acceptance of and trust in the therapist

Counselling offer of Aids Hilfe Bern

1. Introduction to the case study
2. Possibilities to get a residence permit
3. Cooperation with doctors, clinics, and HIV consultations
4. Providing psychotherapy
5. Psychosocial attendance

Counselling offer of Aids Hilfe Bern

Case study: F. G.

- female, 32 years old, from Ivory Coast
- victim of a mass rape during political conflicts in 2007, sexual and physical violence during escape 2012
- had been working as an accountant, studies in engineering couldn't be finished because of the traumatic event
- entry into Switzerland 2012 after escaping via Lebanon and Italy
- HIV diagnosis 2009 in Ivory Coast, begin of therapy 2010 with regular interruptions due to a lack of medication
- Escape reason: medical situation

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- Possibilities to get a residence permit, support during the asylum procedure
- contact to information centers which are providing pro bono legal services and assessing the possibilities to obtain a residence permit
- improvement of the living conditions during the asylum procedure (accommodation, day structure, medical supply)
- cooperation with the responsible asylum authorities

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Case study

- Organizing support from the Red Cross (medical services for illegals) when client was asking for asylum
- Support during the asylum procedure, organization of a pro bono lawyer
- Working together with the hospital in order to provide the needed medical information for the asylum procedure
- cooperation with the authorities to improve the living conditions = change of accommodation from a big centre to a small living community

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- Cooperation with doctors, clinics, and HIV consultations
- providing information about HIV/Aids, STI, living with HIV, treatment, sexuality
- cooperation with project “multicolore” of Aids Hilfe Bern to provide translation and attendance in native language

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Case study

- regular communication with the university hospital to obtain information about client's health condition
- continuous counselling about HIV/Aids, therapy, family planning, future perspectives with the disease
- contact person in case of questions or health problems, coordination with doctors
- providing information about HIV to the authorities

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— Providing psychotherapy

- assessment of the need of therapy with the client
- Seeking suitable therapeutic offers

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Case study

- discussion with the client about trauma and consequences for mental health and daily life
- information about therapy and therapeutic offers
- seeking a place in a treatment program
- close cooperation with the outpatient clinic for victims of torture and war in Bern

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– Psychosocial attendance

- Frequent counseling interviews, empowerment
- communication with translation if needed
- providing financial aid if needed
- contact to other people concerned
- support in the areas of accommodation, work, legal questions in order to provide stable living conditions

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Case study

- at the beginning counselling interviews every two weeks to build up trust and organize daily life in Bern
- providing financial aid (food, swim course, clothes)
- psychosocial consultation

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Counselling offer of Aids Hilfe Bern

Requirements for professionals:

- knowledge and expertise of HIV/AIDS and PTSD
- empathy, respect, reliability, authenticity, confidentiality

Principles for professionals:

- building a trustful relationship to the client
- giving support and providing security
- avoiding unintentional confrontation with the trauma
- self-management (supervision, exchange with peers)

Take home messages

- HIV positive and sexually traumatized women and men need our help
- They need help to overcome the trauma and accept and integrate HIV in their life
- They need acceptance, empathy, patience and stable relationships
- They need secure living conditions and medical and therapeutic supply
- They need other people concerned to share their experiences
- They need trained professionals who are able to face their stories and give support

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