Social and welfare inequities in people living with HIV in England and Wales: results from Positive Voices 2017

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BACKGROUND
- Socioeconomic status is an important predictor of health.
- In the UK, HIV disproportionately affects socially vulnerable populations such as migrants, gay men and drug users, whose experience may compound social inequity.
- People living with HIV have a diverse range of service needs, related to their HIV, as well as their health, welfare and social care.
- The extent to which these needs are currently being met is unknown. We present national estimates of the met and unmet service needs of people with HIV in the UK.

METHODS
Positive Voices is a cross-sectional, probability survey of people with HIV, conducted between January and September 2017.

RESULTS
Met and Unmet Needs: Health, Social and Welfare Services

- HEATH-RELATED NEEDS
  - Proportion of patients with a need: 77%
  - Proportion of needs that were unmet: 47%
  - The areas of greatest health-related need were: stress management, speaking to a psychologist/counsellor, weight management, and advice regarding sex life.
  - The greatest social/welfare needs were for housing support, help claiming benefits and help dealing with loneliness and isolation: the latter was also the area of greatest unmet need.

- EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY
  - High educational attainment was observed across all age, ethnicity and gender groups, with 55% completing post-secondary education (e.g. technical/vocational training or undergraduate degree and higher).
  - Despite this, 10% of respondents were unemployed, compared to 4.1% among the UK general population during the same period.
  - Disparities were observed by sex and ethnicity, with highest unemployment rates among black Caribbeans (22%), black Africans (18%) and South Asians (19%) compared to 9% in white British (Fig. 1).

- HEALTHSERVICES
  - Drug or maintenance chemotherapy
  - Stress management
  - Smoking cessation
  - Alcohol counselling/treatment
  - Weight management
  - Smoking cessation
  - Advice regarding sex life
  - Home health services
  - Family planning
  - 51% of respondents did not have enough money to meet their basic needs all of the time (Fig 2).
  - 29% of PLHIV were in receipt of welfare benefits, compared to 8% in the UK general population.

- SOCIAL AND WELFARE SERVICES
  - Loneliness or isolation
  - Career skills and training
  - Financial advice
  - Employment advice
  - Legal advice
  - Relationship advice
  - Meal or food services
  - Immigration support
  - Domestic violence services
  - Housing support
  - Benefit claim support

- 60% of respondents who indicated they needed this help/service in the past months (Fig 2).

LIMITATIONS
- These data are limited due to potential recall bias over the 12 month recall period.
- Self-reported need does not always reflect true level of need; for example, undiagnosed drug/alcohol misuse.
- The survey was available in English only. People with no/poor English, literacy issues or visual/cognitive impairment may be excluded, resulting in biased estimates of education, financial hardship and need.

DISCUSSION
- In the UK, people with HIV experience disproportionately high levels of unemployment and financial hardship despite high educational attainment.
- Even within this population who is engaged in healthcare services, a high level of need was reported, particularly around stress/counselling, and housing, welfare benefits and loneliness and isolation.
- Access to non-HIV related health services and social and welfare services are an integral part of long-term care and support and should be considered in planning future programming.

- This comprehensive needs assessment provides important data for commissioners and health service providers to identify gaps in service provision and to inform the development of service specifications.

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