

Integrating Individual and Structural Health Risk: A Social Identity Perspective on the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract : Psychology most often considers the role of experience and behaviour in shaping health at the individual level. On the other hand epidemiology has long considered risk at the wider group or structural level. Here we use the social identity approach to integrate group-level risk with individual level behaviour. Using a social identity approach we demonstrate that group or macro-level factors impact implicitly and profoundly in everyday ways at the level of individuals, via social identities. We illustrate how identities related to race, gender and inequality intersect to affect HIV/AIDS risk and AIDS treatment behaviours; how social identity processes drive stigmatising consequences of HIV and AIDS, and promote positive and effective interventions. We conclude by arguing that the social identity approach offers the field an explanatory framework that conceptualizes how social and political forces intersect with individual identity and agency to affect human health.

Keywords : social identity approach, HIV/AIDS, Africa, HIV risk, race, gender

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