Cognitive aging is premature among a community sample of optimally treated Australian living with HIV

Authors: Aung H L1,2, Bloch M2,3, Vincent T3, Quan D3, Jayewardene A3,4, Liu Z5, Gates T1, Brew B1,2,6, Mao L7, Cysique LA1,8

1Departments of Neurology and HIV Medicine, St Vincent's Hospital and Peter Duncan Neurosciences Unit, St Vincent’s Centre for Applied Medical Research, Sydney, Australia, 2 Faculty of Medicine, UNSW, Sydney, Australia, 3Holdsworth House Medical Practice, Sydney, Australia, 4Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia, 5Stats Central, UNSW, Sydney, Australia, 6Faculty of Medicine, University of Notre Dame, Sydney, Australia, 7Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW, Sydney, Australia, 8 UNSW Psychology, Sydney, Australia

Background: While some research has indicated that there may be premature cognitive aging among people living with HIV (PLHIV), results are derived from non-community samples with suboptimal combination antiretroviral therapy (cART) access and virological control. The current study assessed whether age and HIV status interact to lead to premature cognitive aging among a community sample of PLHIV with high cART coverage and their age and lifestyle-matched HIV negative (HIV-) counterparts while considering the mental health and non-HIV comorbidity burden.

Methods: This study enrolled 254 HIV+ and 72 HIV- gay and bisexual men (mean age = 49 years; SD=10.2) from Holdsworth House Practice in Sydney. Neurocognitive function was evaluated with the Cogstate Computerized Battery (CCB) at baseline and 6 months assessing speed of processing, attention/working memory, and verbal learning and memory. Linear mixed-effect models examined main and interaction effects of HIV status and chronological age on CCB age-uncorrected global neurocognitive z-score (GZS) adjusting for repeated testing, and then adjusting sequentially for HIV biomarkers, mental health, and comorbidities.

Results: The majority of HIV+ participants were on cART (92%) and were virally suppressed (84%). Only 15% had a history of HIV disease CDC stage C. HIV positive status and age interacted to produce lower GZS ($\beta=-0.43$ (95% CI=-0.85, -0.02), p<0.05). Among covariates, a higher level of con-current anxiety symptoms ($\beta=-0.11$ (95% CI=-0.19, -0.04), p<0.01), historical AIDS ($\beta=-0.12$ (95% CI=-0.22, -0.03), p<0.05), and historical HIV brain involvement ($\beta=-0.12$ (95% CI=-0.22, -0.01), p<0.05) were associated with lower GZS.

Conclusion: We found a robust medium size premature aging effect on cognition in a community sample with optimal HIV care. Our study supports routine screening of cognitive and mental health among older PLHIV.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:
Bruce J. Brew contributes to the Natalizumab advisory board (Australia) 2006-; Biogen Idec PML advisory board (Natalizumab) International 2008-; GlaxoSmithKline national advisory board 2009-; Merck Serono PML international advisory board 2009- and contributed to the Biogen Alzheimer’s advisory board in 2018. He has received speaker honoraria from Janssen. He is on the AIDS editorial board (2018-), Lancet HIV; and the Journal of Neurovirology.

Mark Bloch has served as an advisory board member and/or educational speaker for Gilead Sciences, ViiV Healthcare, Janssen and Abbvie and has received travel assistance from Gilead Sciences.

All the other authors declare no conflict of interests.