Abstract

HIV/AIDS is an illness that is more correlated than any other with high rates of stigmatization and discrimination. People diagnosed with this illness have to cope with a new potentially life threatning situation and stigmatized identity. Common social interactions or heath complications become a potential source of confrontation, which can endanger social relations, or damage and spoil the identity of people living with HIV/AIDS. This study jointly analyzes the concept of social and health risks, stigmatization and identity and focuses on the following: 1) The process of coping with the diagnosis and its impact on the identity and everyday life of people living with HIV/AIDS 2) The role of accessible social networks on the coping process with this illness and stigmatization; and 3) The strategies of health and social risk management used in connection with this illness. Awareness and acquisition of information on HIV/AIDS plays an important role in overcomming the initial shock of the diagnosis and coping with the disease. Thanks to the support of social networks, the diagnosed person can reach much easier and faster the so called „rational approach" to the illness and safely awknowledge and accept HIV/AIDS as a part of his or her life. People living with HIV/AIDS also face many risks. In this study, the health risks are broken into two different categories: self health jeopardy and the endangerment of the health of others. Within this framework of risks, in regards to self health, people with HIV/AIDS employ either a proactive approach leading to adaptation, or a passive aprroach leading to stagnation and resignation. The risks associated with endangering the health of others are principally managed through prevention. Since the medicalized HIV/AIDS illness is mostly asymptomatic and often stays hidden, people with HIV/AIDS face the dilemma of if, when, how and whom they should inform about their illness so they can minimalize the possible negative effects of their decision, so called social risks. The study reveals that the most effective defense against social risks and stigmatization is information management.