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Petra Buchwald¹ and Sara Perez²
¹Heinrich Heine-University of Duesseldorf, Germany
²Kent State University, USA

Abstract

Coping with stress for HIV+ men who have sex with men (MSM) can be extraordinarily complex due to the interaction of societal status, sexual orientation, and other issues of social identity, such as culture and socio-economic status. Following the idea that stress is not only individually appraised but also strongly related to the greater social context in which we exist, stress and coping of HIV+ MSM are analyzed in the framework of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1998). COR theory offers a framework for analyzing stress and coping strategies by focusing on the resources of individuals and communities. COR theory provides a theoretical model in which resource loss, maintaining existing resources, and gaining resources necessary for engaging in healthy behaviors can be examined. This paper aims at introducing COR theory as a model that responds to the need to incorporate more fully both the objective and perceived environment into the process of coping with stress.

In the application of COR theory to this marginalized group of HIV+ MSM, new insights into the interplay of stress, life conditions, sexual behavior, personality, and the coping processes will be gained. To begin, we will describe the life situation of HIV+ MSM. We will show how this group, socialized and stigmatized by their sexual orientation, as well as by their HIV infection, contributes to the diversity of our society. Thereafter a conceptual model based on COR theory, is developed, incorporating personal and structural resources, as well as stressors of HIV+ MSM. Drawing on our own research, conducted within the framework of COR theory, coping of HIV+ MSM is considered and new contributions to our understanding about stress and coping in this group are discussed. Finally, we point out future directions for enhancing stress prevention and coping intervention for HIV+ MSM with respect to praxis and research issues.