

Hpv and cervical cancer among indigenous amazonian women

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



The idea of modern hunter-gatherer societies in the world today is a subject that often ignites the academic community. Trying to solve world problems and public health issues are also central topics of discussion among the younger academic community and the scholarly academic community. Debates ranging from subsistence consumption to disease patterns among populations have generated a plethora of research to be done around the globe. Among some of this research are results showing a steep rise in human papillomavirus, otherwise known as HPV, and cervical cancer among the hunter-gatherer communities of the Amazon. This has left scholars to wonder what the cause could be since cervical cancer is considered to be a “modern disease”. Researchers are trying to see what amplifying difference or similarity of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle in comparison to the Western lifestyle is contributing to the increase of HPV among indigenous hunter-gatherer women.

Something that could contribute to the high incidence of HPV and cervical cancer among indigenous hunter gather women would obviously be the lack of HPV vaccinations. Possibly, another reason for the increase could be the lack of frequent hygienic actions among hunter-gatherers in comparison to Western society. The lack of reproductive protection would also be a leading cause for HPV and cervical cancer among indigenous hunter-gatherer women. While women are the only people that can have cervical cancer, it is well known among the medical community that men also can contract HPV through sexual intercourse and may even develop genital cancers as a result. If men can contract the virus, then researchers should explore what the total percentage of HPV is among these isolated hunter-gatherer

communities to provide a broader picture of the rising outbreak. Among the peer reviewed papers that will be discussed and compared, it will be interesting to see the preventive measures that could be attempted among the hunter-gatherer populations.

Regardless of the simple way in which these indigenous people choose to live they are still susceptible to the diseases that affect all humans. While HPV is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) and typically does little harm beyond the warts that typify it, the disease can cause the body to become susceptible to other infections and conditions that can be much deadlier. For example, cervical cancer is one of the biggest responses to HPV female bodies tend to succumb to as the rapidly generated cells can quickly become cancerous. While this is a disease that is normally written off as a modern world disease, there are members of hunter-gather populations that do contract and end up with both HPV and cervical cancer as shown by the work of Fonseca et. al (2015) . These researchers worked with isolated indigenous women of the Amazon rainforest in 2015, then released a paper of their findings and possible solutions. The study by she and her colleagues is what ignited the research that was done for this very paper. Researchers had been surveying indigenous Amazonian tribes in order to track the rate of HPV spreading among native women. They were attempting to understand how the indigenous lifestyle and interaction with Western society impacted the chances of contracting the virus. The main tribe they worked with is the Yanomami, who are a hunter-gatherer tribe that is isolated deep within the Amazon rainforest. The researchers compared the Yanomami women's rates

of contracting HPV to those of other indigenous tribes that live and interact more closely with Western societies, such as women of the Macuxi and Wapishana tribes. Fonseca et al. (2015) came to the conclusion that there were both limitations and advantages of being an isolated hunter-gatherer group. When isolated there is less chance of contraction and spread of a disease that is mainly conceptualized as a “modern disease”, however, for those that are affected there is also a constraint on the aid for both this group of indigenous women and others effected by HPV. Taking samples from 664 women from 13 different indigenous tribes they were able to conclude that women over the age of 35 where far more likely to contract HPV and in turn contact cervical cancer (Fonseca et. al 2015). Therefore, the goal for the rest of the paper is to discuss and analyze research from other scientists to determine what could possibly explain the high rate of HPV among indigenous women and what can be done to aid them.

In order to understand a population, the environment in which they inhabit must be understood. The environment in which a person inhabits reveals as much about a population as individually testing members of said population. The ecology of the environment speaks volumes at to the way a human population will react when certain stressors are introduced into it. Laura Rival completed her paper in 2006 discussing the Amazon ecology that many of the Amazonian indigenous population still live in presently. In order to create a more holistic study and research practice, looking at data from other fields can always speak to differential factors that are important to the change of an environment and community. Historical Ecology is a sub field of

ecological anthropology that allows anthropologists to ask vital questions that are sometimes overlooked within their own field. Questions such as, in what way does environmental change relate to the historical construction of human societies? Laura Rival (2006) is attempting to unpack the dense collection of historical ecology that has engulfed the Amazon rainforest and the effects that it has had not only on the indigenous population that was already located there but also how they would be impacted by a growing western society that would soon come to settle in their traditional places. One of the relationships she is attempting to dissect is the relationship between the indigenous populations and the forests that they inhabit; which would challenge the traditional thought taught of human occupation. One of Rival's points seen within her research is that we must look at the onset pressures of outside forces, such as the push for agriculture, on the homeland of indigenous populations (Rival 2006). By the end of her paper she encourages that while we use older academic literature as a guide and tool for studying ecology in the present we cannot negate the population that actively lived within said ecology at the same time (Rival 2006).

While it is imperative to understand the environment in which a population is living and how it can affect their health, it is equally important to attain a better insight on the disease itself as this will allow researchers and new readers to the academic literature to brainstorm ideas on how to aid the situation or possibly even cure it. As stated in the introduction, the CDC labeled HPV as the most transmitted disease among humans. Researchers in 2012 questioned that if HPV is high among indigenous women, then what

would be the rate of Human T-Lymphotropic virus (HTLV), a cancer-causing virus triggered by HPV. Blas et. al (2012) looked at the association between HPV and HTLV in indigenous women of the Peruvian Amazon. The scientists were looking at the relationship between the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Human T-Lymphotropic virus (HTLV) since being able to identify the association between both viruses could potentially aid in determining populations that are at a higher risk for developing cervical cancer. The research was conducted during 2010 and 2011 where cross sectional examinations were done within Amazonian Peruvian women (Blas et. al 2012). Taking a large sample size from two different cities they attempted to construct an indicator that would show scientists a marker that will allow identification as to whether a population is more at risk for HPV. Among looking for the connection between HPV and HTLV researchers are also trying to find other concepts that will aid in containing the virus and aiding those already affected. What they came to find is that the HTLV virus has a higher chance of forming within indigenous populations when HPV is already seen in the high-risk communities (Blas et. al 2012). After the research was concluded, Blas et. al (2012) suggested that more testing be done in a longitudinal manner to delineate the populations based on their stages of HPV in order to yield better results (Blas et. al 2012).

Understanding the way in which the virus interacts with other diseases and the rate at which it spreads itself is vital to Western medicine for understanding how it interacts overall with human populations. Looking at the relationship that the Amazonian indigenous people have with medicine

and the way in which they see their own world, coupled with the way in which hunter-gather groups tend to persist around the world, could give better insight as to why the spread of HPV can be seen but why it is not moving through populations in the Amazon at the same rate as in places more westernized, for example, Rio de Janeiro or America.