

The aids epidemic

[Health & Medicine](#)



Ever since the initial description of Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1(HIV-1) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 2(HIV-2) in the early 1980s, these two viruses have been repeatedly confirmed to be the causative agents behind Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

HIV-1 is the most predominant cause of AIDS in the world today and developing countries in Asia, South America and Sub-Saharan Africa bear the brunt of the AIDS epidemic (Hoffman et al 2007).

AIDS is a condition that is caused by immune system deficiency. It is a syndrome since it encompasses a pattern characterized by different symptoms presenting with varied manifestations. As an acquired condition or disease, infection is transmitted from person to person via specific transmission routes.

These modes of transmission sets it apart from the numerous immune system diseases which are mainly genetic related or caused by anti-cancer as well as immune suppressing therapies.

The first instances of AIDS infection can be traced to between 1979-1980 where HIV infections presented as a new disease that had never existed in medical practice or terminology (Chandramouli & Hubley 1995).

AIDS among African Americans

In 1981, Los Angeles doctors noticed a new disease. They were baffled that young men who were apparently healthy began developing pneumonia like disease caused by a microorganism that had never been detected before.

It was strange because it was known that pneumocystis only caused disease among those with a compromised immune system. In New York, doctors
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began recording a new disease among young men. They identified the disease as being Kaposi's sarcoma because it damaged the immune system.

One strange fact was that all the men infected were homosexuals, many of whom had contracted other sexually transmission infections like syphilis and gonorrhoea. They reached a conclusion that the new disease must also be sexually transmitted (Chandramouli & Hubley 1995).

The same symptoms were also found to be prevalent among the intravenous drug users and hemophiliacs. Since many of the drug users shared needles, researchers concluded that the disease was also transmitted through body fluids like blood.

Since AIDS was mainly concentrated among gays and drug users who were mainly blacks a misconception arose due to the inherent discrimination and the disease was not tackled as it should have been.

The result was a rapid spread of AIDS among the black community. The underlying socioeconomic and political factors helped to further fuel the AIDS epidemic among African Americans.

Currently, African Americans are still disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. While blacks constitute only 13% of the entire US populace, 49% of AIDS cases are found among blacks. It has also been established that AIDS is the leading cause of mortality among Black women in the age bracket 24-34.

Among men in the age group 33-44, AIDS is the second leading cause of death (<http://www.hhs.gov/>). Among African Americans, statistics show that more than 36% of all AIDS cases are attributable to homosexual/bisexual

activity and approximately 38% are attributable to intravenous drug injections.

Infections due to heterosexual contact account for approximately 12% of infections. This puts black Americans at a much higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, mainly due to same-sex sexual behavior, than other racial categories like Hispanics and Whites.

The magnitude of the AIDS scourge among Black Americans is also due to a history of discrimination and neglect in instituting measures aimed at promoting a deviance from bisexual activity and other measures of prevention among the black community.

The misperception that AIDS was only concentrated among blacks buttressed with the risk factors has served to worsen the AIDS scenario to this day (Levine et al 1997).

The Origin of AIDS

Ever since the AIDS epidemic became a reality, several theories and evidences have been put forward to try and explain the origins of the AIDS epidemic. Just like any controversy, various fronts of argument have made it almost impossible to clearly confirm the exact origin of the virus.

However, there is evidence that the retrovirus incriminated in causing AIDS has been in the environment even before AIDS as a disease became its worldwide spread.

The current debates on the origins of the AIDS epidemic is not limited to the biological factors but has also been complicated by various political, social and economic theories that not only attempt to provide an explanation on <https://assignbuster.com/the-aids-epidemic/>

the nature of the spread; as in among African Americans, but also provide scientific evidence to the extent that the virus was a product of genetic engineering.

Initially, as the virus spread among the African American community, the disease and its etiologic agent remained largely unknown to the medical community. It has also not been resolved whether the virus originated from American soil or from African soil.

The first pandemic is believed to have its origin in America but the second epidemic caused by the HIV-2 has its center in West Africa. At the same time it is also believed that HIV-1 began to spread via three distinct routes; two routes have been traced to North America, while the third route has been traced to Central Africa. It is uncertain whether the American and the African routes possess any relation whatsoever.

The origin of the AIDS virus is attributed to an assertion made at a Congressional Hearing in 1969. It was predicted that the US military was in the process of developing a super germ for its use in the biowarfare program. The development of the new germ was to be made possible by the advancement in genetic engineering.

The super germ would also have the capacity to wipe out massive human populations. Its mode of transmission would make ineffective any human intervention to prevent its spread. The Department of Defense spokesperson is on record for having said that, " Within the next five to ten years, it would be possible to produce a new infective microorganism which

could differ in certain important respects from any known disease causing organisms.

Most important of these is that it might be refractory to the immunological and therapeutic processes upon which we depend to maintain our relative freedom from infectious disease”(Testimony given before the Sub-Committee of the House Committee on Appropriations, Department of Defense Appropriations for 1970, Washington, 1969) (Cantwell 1992, p 137).

This initial assertion was later on buttressed by J. Clemmesen; a Copenhagen epidemiologist in 1973 when lecturing cancer researchers. He presented a visualization of a situation in which a virus could naturally or be scientifically being induced to mutate to produce a very contagious variant capable of causing an epidemic and thwarting any chances of vaccination.

A decade after the Congressional hearing, the predictions seemed to have become a reality with the coming of the AIDS epidemic spreading throughout the world despite interventions to prevent its spread.

By 1985, four years after the first case of AIDS had been reported by doctors in excess of 130 countries had confirmed AIDS within their borders. This position of the origin conclusively shows that AIDS originated from the military laboratories (Cantwell 1992).