

Iranian Research Center for HIV/AIDS (IRCHA): Two Decades of HIV-Related Psychosocial Care and Treatment in Iran

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LETTER TO EDITOR

Iranian Research Center for HIV/AIDS (IRCHA), as the leading research center with focus on HIV in Iran, was founded in 2005 with the aim of cultivating contemporary and cutting-edge research targeting basic, epidemiologic, psychological, treatment and care aspects of the epidemic both at national and regional levels. IRCHA is committed to recognition of the potential capacities available at academic level; and endeavors to develop motivated students and researchers through training programs, providing mentorships, and facilitating practical research opportunities to fulfill the goal of “reaching to zero HIV cases”.

In 2005, IRCHA was established in Imam Khomeini Hospital affiliated with Tehran University of Medical Sciences to address unidentified aspects of the HIV treatment and care in Iran integral to the national response to waves of HIV predominating people who inject drugs.

From the first year of activity, IRCHA has made huge contributions to the national guidelines for HIV diagnosis, treatment and care. The academic and clinical background besides the organizational capabilities, has been detrimental in the strong networking capacities developed through years between IRCHA and in total of 17 internal and external research institutes, academic organizations, and international agencies. IRCHA has also been successful in growing communities of most vulnerable population groups including people who inject drugs (PWID), female sex workers, and transgendered people through research and education projects. In the research section, since 2005, 330 research projects have been registered, including 125 dissertations, 36 Health System Research (HSR), 58 randomized controlled trial (RCTs), and 111 basic science projects.

IRCHA is located in a same building where the voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) center, the department of infectious diseases, and a clinical ward are located. IRCHA has also inaugurated a research and clinical laboratory in the same site. Psychosocial and educational needs of the patients referred to the VCT, based on the findings of IRCHA’s research projects, prompted the establishment of an individual program for them.

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In the year 2006, through collaboration with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the aid of Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) one of the first “Positive Club” was instituted in Iran. The club has been pioneered for other clubs in Iran. Also, the club won Red Ribbon Award (RRA) in 2016. Formation of this unique complex has resulted in promoting the quantity and quality of research proposals with the utmost variety of topics related to HIV, and other co-morbid infectious and non-infectious disorders depending on the local characteristics of the epidemic in Iran.

IRCHA has won in various national and international festivals, totaling 12 festivals from 2005 to 2025.

The services provided to clients at this center include HIV Clinic, Vulnerable Women Clinic, and Virtual Online Clinic (Figure1). Details of the groups included in this service delivery system are given in Supplementary Figure 1. In the psychological part at the IRCHA, various interventions have been used [1-11] (Supplementary Figure 2).

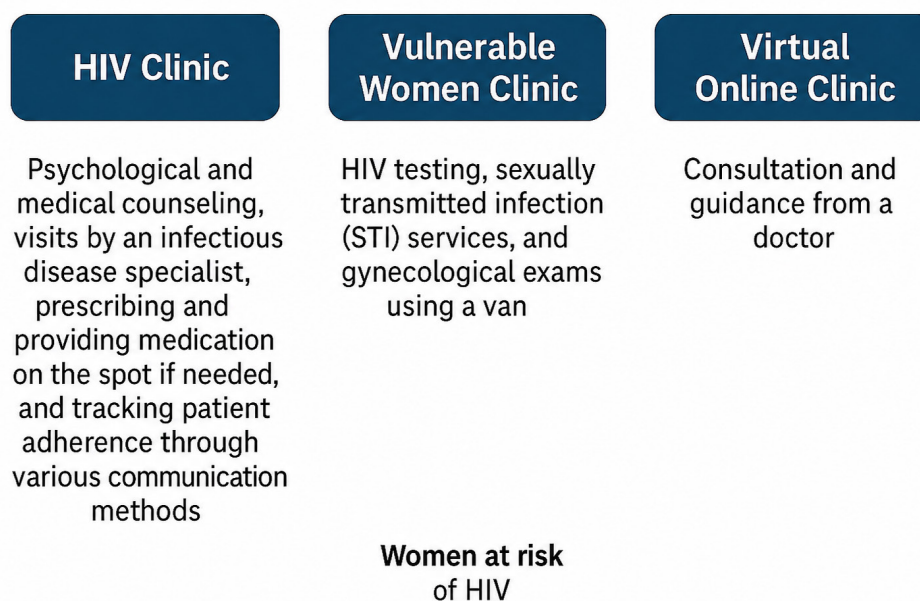
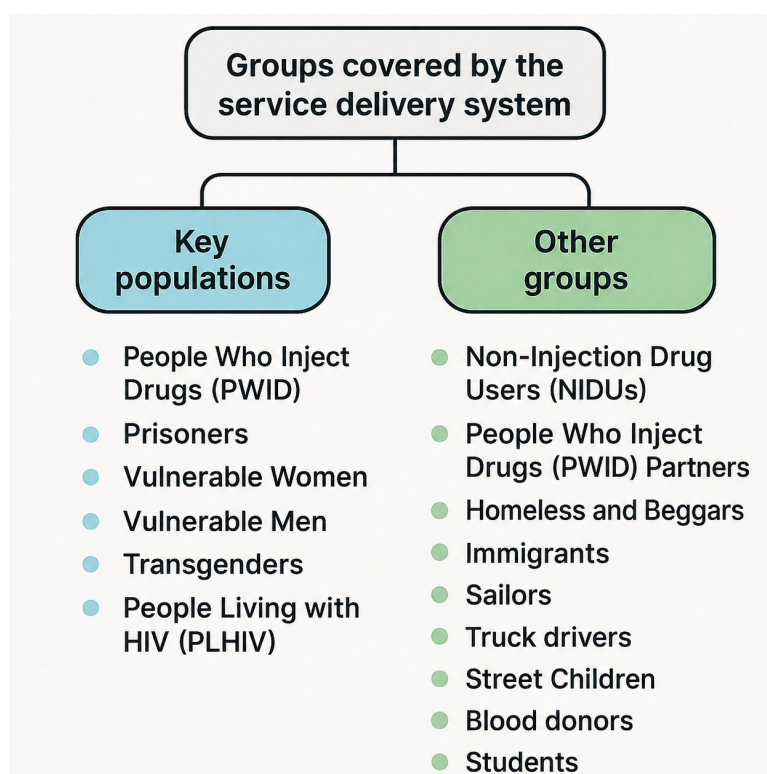
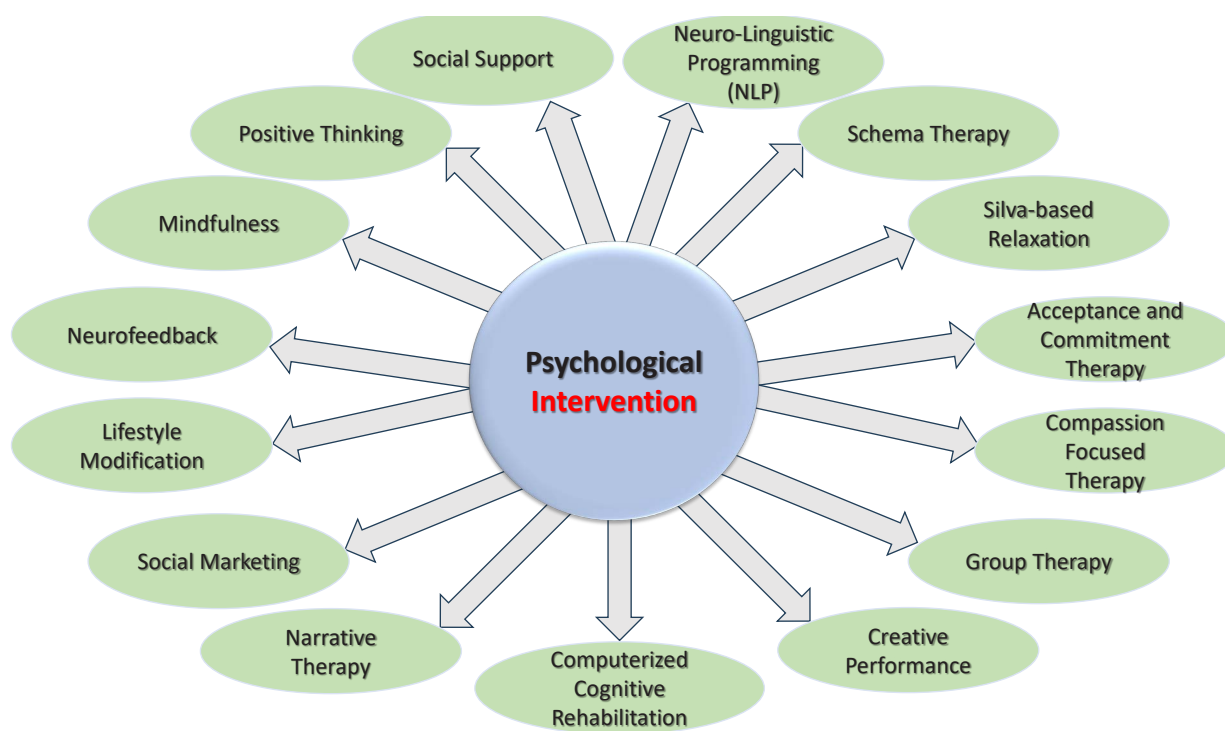


Figure1. Overview of clinical and psychosocial services provided at the IRCHA.



Supplementary Figure 1. Groups Addressed and Studied in the Service Delivery Framework.



Supplementary Figure 2. Psychological interventions at the IRCHA.

IRCHA's coherent activity has enabled all research and service activities to operate within a specific framework. This makes their activities more transparent and reliable. On the other hand, this system has played an important role in helping people living with HIV and has created a suitable space and platform for more precise planning and targeted activities. These initiatives underline the central role of applied psychological interventions in enhancing treatment adherence, reducing risk behaviors, and improving quality of life among people living with HIV.

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The authors declared that ChatGPT was used for preparing the figure.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that they have no conflicts of interest.

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