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Psychological impact of HIV/AIDS stigma among women of African origin in Germany: What can we learn from their stories?

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Reports from Germany (2012-13) points a 70% increase in heterosexual transmission with about 40-50% from Sub Saharan Africa marking new diagnosis especially in women. HIV-related stigma among African women is rather complex using the intersectionality framework for analysis, which distinguishes the subjective experiences and realities of women's lives, not just as a single category stemming from a gender-based research critique. Meanwhile, HIV-stigma denotes the link between sero-status and negative behaviors toward people who are seropositive. Stigma thus reflects guilt, shame, denial, prejudice, discrediting, discrimination, stereotypes, denial, rejection and self-blame. African women are particularly vulnerable to stigma due to various factors often undermined or neglected. It is imperative to mention that women are generally susceptible to infection due to biological and other socio-cultural reasons, which eventually positions them into a high risk category. Furthermore, women tend to be negatively perceived when infected and labeled promiscuous for transmitting the virus to their partners, without knowing the transmission dynamic. Stigma further constrains relationships within families and communities. This in the long term results into secrecy affects infection status disclosure and seeking of the much needed support services. This highlights the link between HIV and mental health because people living with HIV are prone to mental problems compared to the others. Thus, their psychological and social wellbeing becomes essential just as their physical health. HIV-related stigma further complicates the overall wellbeing of these women in realizing their potentials in life, which tends to hamper their productivity and sense of purpose. The in-depth study of six women shows the dilemmas and challenges faced by seropositive women in the face of HIV, dealing with disclosure issues, anxiety, depression, social isolation, stress, fear and rejection. This convenient sample examines how psychological impact continues to affect sero-positive women negatively in living fulfilled lives while impacting on their unfulfilled sexual satisfactions due to continuous use of condoms and other related anxieties. At times, such insecurities become overwhelming, pushing them to neglect their self-esteem as women. Interpretative phenomenological analysis here aims to gain deeper understanding from participants' perspectives on how they manage to make opinions and viewpoints of their own experiences, events and social world. It is then vital to provide lived experiences and interpretations in own terms, than simply attributing to pre-existing theoretical preconceptions, by getting details of each case than general claims (ibid).

Biography

Joyceline Ntoh Yuh is a Feminist and Doctoral candidate in the University of Oldenburg, Germany. She holds an MA in Women & Gender Studies from the ISS Erasmus University Netherlands. Her research interest includes HIV/AIDS related issues, Psychology, Gender, Sexual and Reproductive health. Since 2006, she took keen interest in the field of HIV/AIDS where she researched on the impact of HIV on agriculture affecting mostly women with the UN FAO gender unit (Italy), mainstreaming HIV policies in UNFFE Uganda, HIV stigma & child bearing in Africa and currently facilitates workshops with MA students in the area of gender, sexuality & HIV/AIDS. She is also a Reviewer in the *Journal of AIDS Clinical Research & STD* (USA) and works as a counseling volunteer in the AIDS Help NGO, Germany.

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