

"Our Bodies Is So Totally Different": Stories of HIV Positive Women over 50

Chelsea Miller

GMHC Community Coordinator & AVODAH Corps Member

Sarah Glasser

Harlem United Treatment Adherence Specialist - Access To Care

Women of the Action Center Members



GMHC

FIGHT AIDS. LOVE LIFE.

*All the research they've done is on male,
gay white men ...*

Our bodies is so totally different.

– Female GMHC client over age 50 living with HIV

- **Today's Presentation:**

- Highlight research from a qualitative study of women over Age 50 living with HIV/AIDS who receive services at GMHC
- GMHC members share their stories and perspectives

Introduction: Outside Research

- Women underrepresented in study of HIV
- Health disparities between men and women living with HIV
- Available research on women aging with HIV predominately centers on medication adherence, testing habits, sexuality, and health
- CDC reports highest HIV risk factor for women over 50 is heterosexual contact (82%), followed by intravenous drug use (18%)
- Findings in Research: Vaginal dryness, condom usage, and higher rates of co-morbidities
- Need for further investigations into the priorities and needs of women living with HIV

GMHC Study: *Focus Groups to Refocus the Research on Women*

- Two focus groups of HIV+ women over 50 years of age
- 1st group: 8 participants
- 2nd group: 5 participants
- Thematic analysis to find latent themes

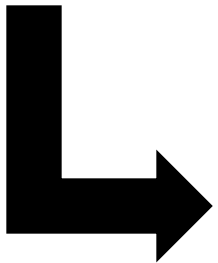


Table 1: Latent Themes		
Health		
Sub-themes	Working Definition	Mentions
Healthcare	Experiences with health care professionals and insurance	26
Medications	Medications for HIV, side effects, and adherence	25
Substance Use	Drugs, alcohol, addiction, and sobriety	19
Comorbidity	Co-occurring physical and mental health issues	14
Interpersonal Relationships		
Disclosure	Telling others HIV-status	28
Trauma	Intimate partner violence and death of loved ones	25
Dating and Sex	Romantic relationships, sex and desire	20
Negative Self-Image	Self-esteem and perception	9
Individual Strengths		
Faith	Spirituality and religion	10
Allies	Relationships with people with similar experiences	8
Boundaries	The ability to identify and maintain one's personal limits	7

Analysis of Themes- Breaking it Down

- **Health Theme:**
 - Co-Morbidity, the Healthcare System, Medications, and Substance Use
- **Interpersonal Relationships Theme:**
 - Disclosure, Trauma, Dating and Sex, and Negative Self-Image
- **Individual Strengths:**
 - Faith, Allies, Boundaries

Discussion and Directions for **Future** Research

- **Health Theme**

- Pre-existing co-morbidities
- Distrust of healthcare providers
- Shame: issues with sobriety and adherence

- **Interpersonal Relationships Theme**

- Questions around HIV education and disclosure
- System of cyclical violence involved for women living with HIV and a subsequent aversion to romantic relationships and sex
- Differences between catalyzing deaths and paralyzing deaths

- **Strengths Theme**

- Relationship of 'boundaries' to HIV
- Faith's role- sobriety? HIV causing increased religiosity?
- Exploring allyship

Allies in this Room: Intimate Storytelling

- *Group Discussion Rotations (3 rotations):*

1. **Connie:**

Theme- Health, Sub-Theme- **Healthcare**
Theme- Individual Strengths,
Sub-Theme- **Faith**

2. **Lillibeth:**

Theme- Health,
Sub-Theme- **Medications**
Theme- Interpersonal Relationships,
Sub-Theme- **Trauma**

3. **Stephanie:**

Theme- Health,
Sub-Theme- **Substance Use**
Theme- Interpersonal Relationships,
Sub-Theme- **Dating and Sex**

4. **Carlyn:**

Theme- Interpersonal Relationships,
Sub-Theme- **Disclosure**