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

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Women of the Action Center Members
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

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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