

Exploring Effects of Stigma Among Older African American Women Living with HIV

Abstract

Introduction: African American women aged 50 years and older are disproportionately affected by HIV. Yet, there are major gaps in the literature that adequately describe the experiences and needs of older African American women, or OAAW, living with HIV. HIV remains a stigmatized topic and requires further research for this population of interest. Due to their diverse and coexisting identities, OAAW are often subject to racism, sexism, and ageism. HIV stigma adds another layer of complexity to their unique experience. This study aims to explore the effects of stigma among older African American women living with HIV.

Methods: This is a qualitative descriptive study used secondary findings from a previous study with older women living with HIV. A total of 19 HIV positive Black women aged 50 years or older, older African American women or OAAW, participated in this study. A convenience sampling was used to recruit participants in the Ambulatory Care Center HIV Clinic in South Florida, USA. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were transcribed and content analysis was performed to identify major themes. **Results:** Seven themes emerged from the in-depth interviews: (1) Need for HIV to be a secret, (2) Discrimination, (3) Participants perception of anticipated stigma, (4) Changes in behavior associated with fear of stigma, (5) Participants perceptions of reasons for stigmatizing behaviors/discrimination, (6) Participants emotional response to experienced stigma, and (7) Suggestions for future interventions to cope with HIV stigma and raise awareness about it.

Conclusion: Findings from this study confirm HIV-related stigma remains a major barrier for older African American women to overcome and cope with. Future research should be conducted to increase awareness and addressing the effects of stigma among older African American women.