My HIV Diagnosis Was A Blessing: It Saved My Life

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Session Goal:
The goal of this session is to increase the audience’s knowledge of the perceptions and experiences of older African American Men Living in the rural southern United States.

Learning Objectives:
1. By the end of this presentation, the learner will be able to identify the role played by family in supporting HIV positive African American men living in the rural South.
2. By the end of this presentation the learner will be able to discuss the effect of a HIV diagnosis on the lives of older African American men living in a rural area.
3. Identify the potential role of self-care on older HIV-infected African American men in the rural South.
HIV remains at epidemic levels in the rural southern United States (U.S.).

Largest number of new cases are reported in the southern U. S.

African Americans are affected the most.

In 2010, men accounted for 70% of the estimated 20,900 new HIV infections among African Americans.
Drug and alcohol use frequently contribute to the transmission of HIV infection.

It is currently estimated that 50% of adults living in the U.S. with HIV are 50 years of age or older.

Limited data regarding how well African-American men in the rural South are aging with HIV disease.
The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of older African-American men living in the rural southeastern United States.
Methods

- Qualitative exploratory approach
- IRB approval obtained from researchers’ university
- 11 agencies contacted within a 150 mile radius of a major metropolitan city in the southeastern U.S.
- Data collected by focus groups and individual interviews using a researcher developed interview guide
- Demographic data obtained using a short anonymous questionnaire
Methods (cont.)

- Inclusion criteria:
  - Black male
  - 50 years of age or older
  - Living with HIV for at least 5 years
  - Provided informed consent

- Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded

- Participants received a $50 gift card
Data Analysis

- Audio recordings transcribed verbatim
- Three researchers with diverse backgrounds analyzed the data using a constant comparative analysis approach
  - Independently coded the data for themes and these independent themes were compared for similarities and differences across locations prior to combining into one, excluding any redundancy
Results

- 35 men from 5 agencies participated:
  - 27 in focus groups
  - 8 individual face-to-face interviews

Demographic data:
- Mean age 55.6 years
- Living with HIV, mean 20.9 years
- 26% less than high school education
- 77% lived alone
Results

Emerging Themes:
- Doing Fine
- Family Support
- Self Care
Doing Fine

- Men generally content with living in their rural community
- Men expressed concerns about the future as they age with HIV and had to deal with other illnesses of aging
- Majority reported their needs were currently being met
Doing Fine (cont.)

“...but being, havin’ been positive for so long I’ve dealt with it, I’m ok”

“Now that I’m compliant with my doctors and my case managers from the health department, ... I’m comfortable and healthy as far as, um, and I feel that I will have a productive life”.

“I think that I am getting the medication that I need.”
Self Care

- A number of men felt their HIV diagnosis was beneficial, it made them reassess their lives.
- Returning home and leaving the environment in which they had lived in urban areas.
- Men consistently touted the value of staying positive.
Self Care (cont.)

“I had to stop and think and change, and get on that medicine...that is what I did. I’m proud of myself.”

“I’m 62 years old now and I still work out and exercise. And I think that’s got a lot to do with me keeping me being as healthy as I am.”
“So, as far as aging with it, it doesn’t really bother me because I try to do all the good things like eating right, exercising, and you know, do the things that you stop it from spreading like when I have sex, I have…use a condom.”
Family Support

- Main source of both physical and emotional support for men
- The majority of the men had disclosed to family members and experienced acceptance
- Family was a primary reason why many men returned to their rural community
Family Support (cont.)

“...when I told my mom, my mom never even flinched as far as her love and devotion was concerned.”

“I’m so glad that my family was so accepting.”

“...that woman did not turn away from me, she said I love you, said I’m gonna work with you with this, and she is negative.”
Conclusion

- The majority of men reported, they had what they need and remain positive.
- Men’s family support remained strong.
- Men reported that HIV has changed their lives for the better.
Conclusion (cont.)

- This study provides new insight into the lives and perceptions of rural African-American men with HIV
- Expands our understanding of how these men are dealing with HIV and growing old
- Provides insight into why many HIV+ men return or remain in rural southern communities
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