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Stigma and childbearing: Experiences of HIV positive women in Cameroon

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The impact of HIV/AIDS continues to be felt affecting other spheres of life fueled by high levels of stigmatization in Africa. Stigma eventually hampers the fight against HIV from barriers to Voluntary Counseling and testing, hinders disclosure, to non-adherence to treatment. Research shows that one of the main factors fueling HIV related stigma is the sexual nature of the disease which is often attributed to immorality and promiscuity which becomes gendered because culturally women are expected to live a morally up right life. In the face of HIV, women are blamed for contracting the disease and transmitting it to others. Stigma results into negative effects on motherhood which is perceived as the pinnacle of womanhood meanwhile procreation is associated with status, cultural and religious connotations in Cameroon. The study examined HIV stigma from a socio-cultural perspective considering research mostly focused on medical aspects of the disease. Thus, the study assessed how stigma affects women in relation to childbearing. In-depth interviews were conducted to examine the experiences and perceptions of these women alongside their coping strategies. Results indicated that women living with HIV had challenges making informed decisions; fear infecting their partners, discouraged by some medical staff in so doing altering their socio-cultural aspirations and right to motherhood. This is complicated by external societal pressure that compares motherhood to good womanhood. Furthermore, their perceptions about childbearing are greatly affected by societal discourses and HIV stigma. A holistic approach is vital in addressing this pertinent issue among various stakeholders and health facilities considering HIV incidence is peculiar among young women aged 18-30 years which coincides with their peak reproductive years.

Biography

Joyceline Ntoh-Yuh is a Feminist and PhD 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 stigma, gender issues, 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, mainstreaming HIV policies in UNFFE Uganda, HIV stigma & child bearing in Cameroon and currently facilitates workshops with MA students in the area of Gender, Migration and HIV/AIDS.

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