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:

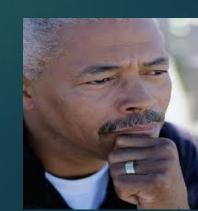
- 1. By the end of this presentation, the learner will be able to identify the role played by family in supporting HIV positive African American men living in the rural South.
- 2. By the end of this presentation the learner will be able to discuss the effect of a HIV diagnosis on the lives of older 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.

Background

- 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

Background (cont.)

- 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

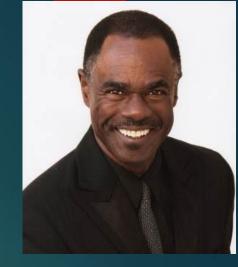




The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of older African-American men living in the rural southeastern United States.

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

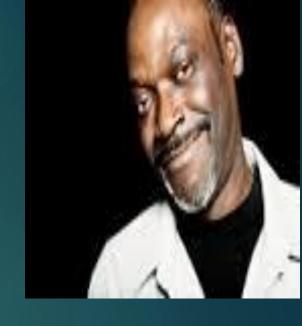
Results

- ▶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."

Self Care (cont.)



"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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