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Psychological consequences of HIV-related stigma among African migrant women in Lower Saxony, Germany: What can we learn from their stories?

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This research was undertaken in 2012 as empirical studies and now focuses on literature in to break the silence of women living with HIV in Bamenda Region of Cameroon. This ongoing studies aims to understand what it means for the African woman having children in the face of HIV/AIDS, taking into account the severe impact of the disease on their social aspirations, cultures and traditions. The research looked at how living with HIV and the stigma associated with it in the society has severely limited women's choices and agency. The psychological distress faced by African women in general irrespective of their HIV-status reflects the pressure and burden women who are unable to conceive or bear children face. This is highly problematic as motherhood holds the highest cultural value for women in the region as well as most African countries. In-depth interviews were conducted to find out the experiences and perceptions of women living with HIV looking at their aspirations with regard to child bearing as well as the responses from the community. The findings indicated that HIV positive women find it challenging to exercise their agency to bear children due to lack of information and external pressures. The research also found avenues where it was possible for women to speak out and make informed choices through the support of Church groups and health clinics, which approached the women's condition holistically taking into account the socio-cultural as well as medical aspects. However, the advance in medical treatment in the west does not represent the conditions back in Cameroon and other African countries, leaving these women with a heavy psychological burden from disclosure, rejection, insecurity, guilt, low self-esteem and hopelessness which continue to hamper their wellbeing.

Biography

Joyceline Ntoh Yuh is a Feminist and Doctoral candidate in the University of Oldenburg, Germany. She holds an MA in Women and Gender Studies from the ISS Erasmus University Netherlands. Her research interest includes HIV/AIDS related issues, psychology, gender, 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 (Italy), mainstreaming HIV policies in UNFFE Uganda, HIV stigma and child bearing in Cameroon and currently facilitates workshops with MA students in the area of gender, migration and HIV/AIDS (health). She is also a Reviewer of the *Journal of AIDS Clinical Research and STD* (USA) and works as a Volunteer in the AIDS Help NGO (AIDSHilfe), Germany.

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