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Sexuality and reproduction in HIV-positive women: A meta-synthesis of how HIV-positive women's experiences of sexuality and reproduction have been described in qualitative studies

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The effectiveness of antiretroviral treatment (ART) has made HIV comparable to a chronic illness regarding life expectancy in well-treated persons. Central to health and well-being are needs related to sexuality and reproduction. Women are particularly vulnerable to HIV due to both biological factors and gender-based inequalities. HIV-positive women present unique challenges regarding sexuality and reproduction as intimate relations and pregnancy. The purpose of the study was to synthesize how HIV-positive women's experiences of sexuality and reproduction have been described in qualitative studies. A meta-synthesis was carried out with 18 peer-reviewed qualitative studies, originating from countries outside Asian and African continents. The analysis shows that HIV-infection made sexuality and reproduction choices problematic; HIV is a burden. The burden is not constant, it is a balancing act. Conditions described in three themes make the weight of the HIV burden heavier; HIV as a barrier, feeling of fear and feeling of loss. Conditions described in three themes makes the HIV burden weight easier; motherhood, spiritual beliefs and supportive relations. The study broadens the understanding of HIV-positive women's situation and identifies important conditions that need to be addressed in developing optimal health care and to better meet the women's needs when it comes to sexuality and reproduction. There is need for individualized support including information about ART, HIV transmission and sexual techniques. In future research, there is need to focus on how health care professionals should perform adequate support to HIV-positive women in relation to sexuality and reproduction.

Biography

Ewa Carlsson-Laloo is working as a Clinical Nurse, specialized in HIV care at the Clinic of Infectious Diseases, Södra Älvsborgs Hospital, Borås, Sweden. She is also PhD student at the Institute of Health and Care Sciences, Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. This study is part of a doctoral thesis about HIV-positive women's sexual and reproductive health.

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