

The Lived Experience of Thai Mothers Living with HIV in Southern Thailand

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Abstract : Mothers living with HIV tend to experience stigma and discrimination which has an impact on their psychological and social well-being and their human rights. This paper explores the lived experience of Thai mothers with HIV in their family. In-depth interviewing and drawing methods were employed to gain a deep understanding on the experience of 30 HIV-positive mothers in the southern community of Thailand. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis method. We found that the majority of HIV-positive mothers learned about their HIV status through blood test services during their antenatal care, but some decided to visit a doctor when their partner became chronically frail and showed some signs indicating HIV/AIDS. Learning about their HIV gave them a great shock, and they could not believe that they were infected with HIV/AIDS. They feared that their illness would be disclosed and hence attempted to keep their HIV secret. This was due to the fact that people in their community would blame and labeled them as a 'disgusting person'. Besides, they would be separated from social contacts and networks, their individual rights would be disregarded, and their potential roles would be restricted. Although participants suggested that people had more positive view on HIV-infected person nowadays, all still wanted to keep it secret because of fear of stigma and discrimination. Thai health care has provided various kinds of support programs, but many mothers chose not to participate due to the fear of disclosure. However, the women attempted to seek some strategies to live a life which would be more acceptable by the community. We conclude that HIV is still seen as a stigmatised disease in rural community of southern Thailand. Local health care providers and relevant sectors in the locality should create suitable programs to enhance self-worth among those HIV-positive mothers because this could increase a quality of life of this vulnerable mothers. Providing sufficient and appropriate supports for better emotional wellbeing is an essential role of health professionals so that the feeling of isolation among these women could be eliminated and positive social justice can be achieved.

Keywords : HIV-positive mothers, lived experience, southern Thailand, stigma and discrimination

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