

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The spread and prevalence of the HIV epidemic has resulted in extensive social, cultural and economic consequences in sub-Saharan Africa. It is estimated that about 60% of adults living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are women. South Africa, with 5.2 million HIV infected people, is estimated to have the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world. HIV among older women is not well documented, despite high prevalence rates amongst women 45 years and older. Moreover, few HIV-related interventions are directed to the elderly in South Africa. HIV risk factors among older women have also not been well documented. It is important to determine the factors associated with older women, and how they affect their HIV infection rates. Understanding these factors may lead to better HIV prevention strategies. This study aimed to determine the HIV prevalence in older South African women and to determine the factors associated with HIV infection in older South African women living in Soweto, Johannesburg.

**Materials and Methods:** We did an analytical cross-sectional study on a convenience sample of 500 women (45 years and older) recruited from various venues in Soweto, a large urban African setting in Johannesburg, South Africa, and who accepted to be tested for HIV. Private face-to-face interviews were conducted and included an assessment of socio-demographic characteristics and behavioural factors thought to be associated with HIV.

**Results:** 449 women were included in the study and 52 (11.6%) women were found to be HIV positive. Increased odds of HIV infection was associated with condom use (OR=3.75, 95%CI: 1.71–8.19), transactional sex (OR=2.44, 95%CI: 1.04–5.69) and marital status. Compared to a

married woman, a woman was more likely to be HIV positive if she was single, widowed or “cohabiting”. Decreased odds of HIV infection was associated with age (OR=0.90, 95%CI: 0.85–0.96) and education. With respect to a woman with less than 5 years of education, a woman was less likely to be HIV infected if she had more than 5 years of education.

**Conclusion:** Further research needs to be done to determine the exact HIV prevalence amongst older women, as well as risk factors associated with HIV infection. It is also important that older women be encouraged to use condoms, as they are known to be an effective barrier to HIV infection. There is need for HIV-related interventions targeted to older women.