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Exploring the embodied experience of HIV positive women on antiretroviral therapy

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ABSTRACT

The introduction and usage of highly active antiretroviral therapy (ART) has changed the history of human immunodeficiency virus infection (HIV), which can result in acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) when left untreated from a deadly condition to a manageable chronic disease. Despite the great success of antiretroviral therapy in managing HIV, women taking the treatment have reported several side effects which produce a body that appears ill. The ART side effects are fundamental to the experience of living longer with HIV. Research linked to side effects of HIV is primarily conducted in Western countries**,** which leaves a gap in our knowledge of the embodied experience of side effects among women living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. This research project explores how women living with HIV experience their bodies and focuses on antiretroviral therapy's embodied side effects. It is crucial to study how HIV-positive women experience their bodies when they are on ART, considering that their bodies are perceived as sex objects, as objects of beauty, and are subject to continuous evaluation and judgment, making it more difficult for them to attain a comfortable embodiment. Eleven HIV-positive women living on antiretroviral drugs for two years or more were interviewed using phenomenological semi-structured interview methods. Their age group was from 26 to 60 years old. The data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, and the themes were grouped using the functional, affective, material, and social dimensions of embodiment. The disruptions of the side effects of ART require adjustments as the women in the study need to come to terms with their altered body and deterioration of the body's capabilities, a disruption to their embodied positioning to the world and everyday activities.

Keywords: Women, HIV/AIDS, Antiretroviral Therapy, Side Effects, and Embodiment.