

## Abstract

Perceptions of HIV and AIDS are inextricably linked to stigma and discrimination and perceptions of HIV positive mothers are particularly complex. In order to obtain a perspective on social perceptions of HIV positive mothers this study interviewed eight HIV negative, working-class mothers. By focusing on HIV negative mothers, who shared the social category of motherhood (thereby providing an insider perspective), HIV was fore-grounded and social perceptions of HIV was explored from an outsider perspective. A vignette was used to facilitate a semi-structured interview which explored issues around general perceptions of the HIV positive individual (with a particular focus on issues around stigma and blame); perceptions of HIV positive motherhood and perceptions of the impact of maternal HIV on the child. Interview data was analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis. Results highlighted that motherhood from the perspective of the mother was perceived differently to motherhood from the perspective of the child. From the perspective of the mother, respondents identified with the HIV positive mother as a black, working-class mother and viewed her as '*normal*' and '*ordinary*.' Identifying infected mothers as part of the group of black, working-class women, respondents drew on their similarity of being powerless in heterosexual relationships. Thus respondents viewed HIV positive mothers as blameless victims when they became infected as their perception was that promiscuity was not a part of motherhood. When motherhood was considered from the perspective of the child, respondents viewed the HIV positive mother as a soon-to-be absent mother who continued to infect her child. The infected mother was perceived to have a relatively short lifespan and as such was perceived to fail in her duty as mother when she was not available to ensure that her child developed normally. Respondents perceived that the absent and unavailable infected mother produced children who are socially, morally and developmentally disadvantaged when they are teased and ostracized by society, fail to grow and develop normally and eventually turn into criminals.