Childbearing in times of HIV/AIDS:
What it means for the African woman and her quality of life.

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Joyceline Ntoh Yuh
Doctoral candidate,
University of Oldenburg,
Germany.

This research was partly undertaken in Cameroon (2012) as empirical studies, having series of follow up and now focuses on Literature to break the silence of African women living with HIV/AIDS. This study draws from experiences of women living in Africa and the West which aims to understand what it means for the African woman having children in the face of HIV/AIDS, taking into account the severe impact of the disease on their social aspirations, cultures and quality of life. The research looked at how living with HIV and the stigma associated with it in the society has severely limited women's choices and agency. The psychological distress faced by African women in general irrespective of their HIV-status reflects the pressure and burden women who are unable to conceive or bear children face. This is highly problematic as motherhood holds the highest cultural value for women most African countries where alternative fertility options and adoption is not common. On the other hand, African women living with HIV in the West also face other challenges which impacts on their wellbeing and quality of life. In-depth interviews were conducted to find out the experiences and perceptions of women living with HIV looking at their aspirations with regard to child bearing and family life as well as the responses from the community. The findings indicated that HIV positive women find it challenging to exercise their agency to bear children due to lack of information and external pressures. While those living in the West, face other challenges hampering their wellbeing. The research also found little avenues for women to speak out and make informed choices but renders extra burden in coping with the disease due to limited support. The dilemmas and emotional distress in getting partners was often marked by rejection and uncertainties. The stories of these women calls for a holistic approach in integrating not just standardized treatment plans but additional psychological support considering social support system is hampered because of disclosure. In so doing, living a fulfilled life becomes harder for those struggling with low self-esteem, depression, guilt and hopelessness with scant attention on their struggles. An interdisciplinary approach from Psychology, Public health and Gender studies was used to conceptualize and analyze the impact HIV stigma has especially on these women's wellbeing taking into consideration other challenges attributed to motherhood in the face of HIV/AIDS. Too little research has been conducted in recent years to better understand the pathogenesis and implications of stigma, how beliefs are generated, perpetuated and translated into behaviors (Keusch et al,2006).

Bio

Joyceline Ntoh Yuh is a Feminist and Doctoral candidate in the University of Oldenburg, Germany. She holds an MA in Women & Gender Studies from the ISS Erasmus University Netherlands. Her research interest includes HIV/AIDS related issues, Psychology, Gender, Sexual and Reproductive health. Since 2006 she took keen interest in the field of HIV/AIDS were she researched on the impact of HIV on Agriculture affecting mostly women with the UN FAO Gender unit(Italy), mainstreaming HIV policies in UNFFE Uganda, HIV stigma in Africa and currently facilitates workshops with MA students in the area of Gender, sexuality, Migration & HIV/AIDS(Health).She is also a Reviewer in the journal of AIDS Clinical Research & STD(USA) and volunteers in counselling sessions with the AIDS Help NGO, Germany.

Email: n_joyce192002@yahoo.com

Phone Number: +4917631005811

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