

Gaps in Gender, Ageing, and HIV Research: Insights from Women's Lived Experiences in NSW

Authors:

PRISCILLA NJERI¹, JANE COSTELLO¹

¹*Positive Life NSW, Sydney Australia*

Background/Purpose:

Women ageing with HIV face intersecting health and social challenges that remain excluded from policy and clinical practice. Despite advances in HIV treatment and increased life expectancy, women aged ≥45 years continue to experience unique, gendered barriers to healthcare access. These include underrepresentation in clinical trials, limited access to specialised and age-appropriate care, persistent stigma and discrimination, and compounded socio-economic vulnerabilities. The experiences of this group are often overlooked, resulting in gaps in care that negatively impact their quality of life and long-term health outcomes.

Approach:

This abstract draws on insights from a bi-monthly online peer support program in New South Wales (NSW) for more than four years facilitated by Positive Life NSW, involving 53 women living with HIV aged ≥45 years. The program provides a safe, peer-led platform for participants to share experiences, raise issues, and identify healthcare gaps, while fostering connection, resilience, and mutual support. Qualitative reflections and discussions were thematically analysed to identify key issues impacting this cohort, ensuring findings are grounded in lived experience.

Outcomes/Impact:

Key issues included weight gain (77%), menopause-related challenges (66%), comorbidities (62%), and mental health concerns (47%). Participants highlighted the importance of healthcare practitioners with expertise in ageing, HIV, and women's health, noting positive care experiences alongside opportunities to improve access to tailored, gender-responsive information and services is critical. Some reported barriers to accessing gender-appropriate health information and feeling unheard. Broader factors, including financial insecurity and personal safety, were also recognised as influencing overall health and wellbeing.

Innovation and Significance:

This peer-led model highlights the value of community-driven spaces in amplifying the voices of women ageing with HIV. Findings identify gaps in gender-responsive, trauma-informed, culturally competent care and women-focused HIV research, underscoring the need for targeted, nuanced frameworks. Overall, they reinforce the importance of wholistic, person-centred approaches and the ongoing role of peer support in HIV-wellbeing.

Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):

Positive Life NSW recognises with gratitude the effort and passion of the community of people living with HIV in NSW.

Positive Life NSW received funding from the NSW Ministry of Health for this program

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Short Bio- Priscilla Njeri

Priscilla Njeri is the Ageing & Peer Support Officer at Positive Life NSW, Australia, with a strong background in HIV advocacy, community-engagement, and health-equity promotion. She is committed to reducing HIV-related stigma through empowerment, inclusivity, and improving quality of life, particularly for women living with HIV in New South Wales.