



The Ontario Women's Study

What Ontario Women Have to Say
about HIV Prevention: Implications for
Policy and Program Development

Preliminary Findings

The Ontario HIV Treatment Network Conference

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The OWS Research Team/Network

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Background

- The **Ontario Women's Study (OWS)** is a community-based research initiative exploring HIV prevention among diverse groups of women living in the province.
- The OWS was initiated by community service providers, community members and researchers who recognized the lack of research that asks women to describe their HIV prevention needs.
- The OWS focuses on the diversity of women's lived experiences among different populations of women.



Objectives

- Document women's understanding of HIV and the social, structural, racial, gender-based and economic factors that influence women's individual HIV-related risk behaviours;
- Determine promising practices for reducing HIV among different populations of women living in Ontario; and
- Transfer this knowledge to decision makers at all levels of government to drive HIV prevention policies and programming for women in Ontario and Canada.



Methods

- Ethics approval obtained from the Ottawa Hospital Research Ethics Board and University of Toronto
- Qualitative component of study
- 14 focus groups
- Thematic analysis
- Inter-rater reliability



Participants

- **Participants 127 Women**

• 14 Focus Groups	#♀
• Transgendered Women	11
• Aboriginal Women	7
• Young Women Who Use Drugs	10
• Women in Sex Trade	8
• Women Living with HIV	11
• Queer African and Caribbean Women	7
• Women Discharged from Prison	6
• Women in Rural Areas (Sudbury)	8
• Women in Rural Areas (Peterborough)	10
• African and Caribbean Women	10
• Latina Women	12
• East and South East Asian Women	10
• Young Women Affected by HIV	7
• South Asian Women	10



Findings: Key Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. HIV Risk	a) Transmission b) Risk Perception
2. Gender and Sex	a) Gender Norms and Stereotypes b) Gender and Self-Esteem c) Transgendered Women and Gender
3. Race and Ethnicity	a) Lack of Culturally/Linguistically Appropriate Services and Resources b) Stereotypes and Racism c) Immigration Issues
4. Economic Factors	a) Low Socioeconomic Status b) The Potential Financial Impacts of Testing Positive for HIV b) Economic Dependence on Others (Often Men)
5. Interpersonal Issues, Supports and Barriers	a) Family b) Peers/Friends c) Sexual Partners
6. Structural Supports and Barriers	a) Structural Supports to HIV Prevention for Women b) Structural Barriers to HIV Prevention for Women
7. HIV Prevention	a) Programming and Intervention Recommendations



Theme 1: HIV Risk

- The majority of women were fairly knowledgeable about how HIV was transmitted. A major issue, however, was the women's lack of perceived personal risk and/or a feeling of lack of control over managing their risk. Women in the sex trade, women who use injection drugs and transgendered women were more likely to perceive themselves as 'at risk'.

Subthemes:

- a) Transmission
- b) Risk Perception

“I was doing workshops with straight women in particular and they were like, “Why are you teaching us this stuff when we're not the ones who are getting it”.



Theme 2: Gender & Sex

- Many women did not have a clear understanding of how/why women are biologically more susceptible to HIV. The women felt that gender roles were significant in increasing their risk. Many heterosexual women spoke of challenges related to infidelity, violence and safer sex negotiation in relationships with males. Transgendered women had unique HIV risk factors related to gender and sex.

Subthemes:

- a) Gender Norms and Stereotypes
- b) Gender and Self-Esteem
- c) Transgendered Women and Gender

“There’s so much shame as a woman to ask those questions, those intimate questions”.



Theme 3: Race & Ethnicity

- Ethnic minority women described issues which specifically influenced HIV risk within their communities (e.g., gender norms; religious and cultural values and norms). They also spoke of structural and systematic issues, often related to racism, which influenced HIV-risk among members of their community (e.g., immigration laws; lack of culturally appropriate services; racism)

Subthemes:

- a) Lack of Culturally/Linguistically Appropriate Services and Resources
- b) Stereotypes and Racism
- c) Immigration Issues

“I feel it’s a huge barrier if someone is a newcomer and can’t find a place where their language is spoken”.



Theme 4: Economic Factors

- Most of the women included in this study identified as having lower socioeconomic status (some middle SES). The women described poverty as often increasing one's HIV risk, especially those women who were homeless, engaged in the sex trade, and/or using drugs. Publicly funded health care was listed as a vital resource for all women. Some women described the challenges of being economically dependent on men.

Subthemes:

- a) Low Socioeconomic Status
- b) The Potential Financial Impacts of Testing Positive for HIV
- c) Economic Dependence on Others (Often Men)

“Like if you have no money for food, you’re definitely not buying condoms or going to the doctor. That’s not your priority”.



Recommendations from the Women

- Government needs to do more
- Mass media campaigns needed
- Need culturally and linguistically appropriate services and resources
- Use multi-media/social media for youth campaigns
- More social women-specific events/information around HIV
- Safe, confidential spaces for women to access testing and services
- Flyers or newsletters (easier to access and more confidential)
- Education geared to different age groups
- Get religious/community leaders to discuss HIV
- Services should be linked and accessible
- Initiatives aimed at educating men (especially hetero men)
- Incentives are necessary for educational events
 - Food
 - Transportation
 - Honoraria
 - Fun Activities



Conclusions

- This study confirms gender as a significant risk factor related to HIV prevention.
- Several cross-group themes exist and several unique themes exist per group, demonstrating the importance of combining general and tailored HIV prevention approaches.
- This study demonstrates how HIV risk occurs for women at the interpersonal, community and social/structural levels and therefore interventions are needed to address risk at each level.
- Men, especially heterosexual men, need to be more aggressively targeted for HIV prevention campaigns, due to their strong influence on women's risk.
- A great deal of HIV prevention education is needed to reduce stigma and promote available services and resources.



Next Steps

- Ongoing team meetings to discuss final analysis, conclusions, recommendations and knowledge translation plan.
- OWS workshop 30th November 2012 with inclusive research team and collaborators .
- OWS Working Conference 7th and 8th March 2013 with team, research participants, knowledge users and decision makers to develop recommendations for HIV policy and programming development and reformulation.
- Complete and publish final report - peer review articles.
- Abstracts submitted for the 3rd International Workshop on Women and HIV from Adolescence to Menopause, and will be submitted for CAHR and IHRA conference.



Questions/Comments

- For more information contact:

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