

TOPIC: THE EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN WOMEN DIAGNOSED WITH  
BOTH HIV/AIDS AND CERVICAL CANCER

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## **Interview 1**

**AGE: 42 years.**

**Interviewer:** How do you experience the diagnosis of HIV/AIDS and cervical cancer in your life?

**Respondent:** Firstly, I want to start by telling you that I went to the doctor at Zola Clinic and they took blood. When I went to fetch my results for HIV/AIDS, the doctor explained to me about the diagnosis of HIV/AIDS. The doctor asked me questions about my life. So, because I was somebody who had many lovers before, that didn't worry me that much. The doctor told me more about HIV/AIDS and I listened to him and I began my treatment. What was happening is that I had headaches, pains and began bleeding.

**Interviewer:** So, tell me, when you were undergoing treatment for HIV/AIDS, did you know that you had cervical cancer?

**Respondent:** No! When I was bleeding the doctor thought that was the symptom of HIV/AIDS. Because I was bleeding a lot and also had headaches and pains, the doctor sent me to Baragwanath Hospital. They tested me and they told me that I have cancer of the cervix.

**Interviewer:** Ok! Already you were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and then later they told you about the diagnosis of cancer of the cervix. Now that you have two illnesses, please explain to me more about your experiences regarding these two illnesses in your life.

**Respondent:** Aah! I don't feel bad because already I knew about HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS and cancer are the same disease, though I didn't know much about cancer of the cervix. I accepted the two diagnoses because they told me about the treatment.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by saying that you have accepted?

**Respondent:** I just accepted everything. I didn't have any pain in me or keep this in my heart. I didn't even think that I will die, and I told myself that God is there all the time, and everything will be OK. And what I need to do is to take care of myself. I told myself that. You know, I didn't say "*eeish*"! Because now I have cancer and HIV this means I'm going to die. I didn't have a lot of worries. I didn't feel any problem or worry.

**Interviewer:** Why do you say you don't have any worry?

**Respondent:** It is because if you are somebody who has moved around the world and had lovers outside, when they tell that you have AIDS it cannot come as a shock. I didn't say, "Hey! Where did I get this disease from?" Anyway I was sleeping around. You know, it is so painful when they tell you about a disease like HIV and you don't understand how you got it, and from whom. If you know that you slept with somebody else you accept because you know that AIDS does not come from somewhere else.

**Interviewer:** Do you mean that you have accepted the diagnoses of HIV/AIDS and cervical cancer?

**Respondent:** Yes. They had explained clearly about HIV/AIDS and even though they didn't tell me more about cervical cancer, I just accepted. The diagnosis of cancer of the cervix appeared later.

**Interviewer:** Okay! I don't want you to explain only about HIV/AIDS, I want to hear about your life experiences regarding the two diseases.

**Respondent:** Actually, they didn't explain a lot to me about cancer of the cervix. I know a lot about HIV/AIDS. What I know is that I have cervical cancer and HIV/AIDS.

**Interviewer:** In other words, you don't know a lot about cervical cancer?

**Respondent:** They just told me that I have cancer of the mouth of the womb. That I understand.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean that you understand?

**Respondent:** Because I was bleeding a lot, they told me that I have cancer of the cervix, and they are going to burn it. And then I will be all right.

**Interviewer:** How did they say they are going to burn it?

**Respondent:** The doctors told me they are going to send me to Johannesburg Hospital to burn it. But first, they wanted to do an operation but they couldn't since I was bleeding a lot. So here at the Hospital they took us for counselling, where it was explained what cervical cancer is and how they are going to burn it. So they explained how we take care of ourselves and I listened to all those things, then I accepted everything.

**Interviewer:** Do you mean that you don't have any problem about the illnesses?

**Respondent:** Now I don't have any problem.

**Interviewer:** Okay, since you said that you went for counselling, are you able to tell anybody about your diagnoses?

**Respondent:** At home I didn't tell them about HIV. I only told them about cancer.

**Interviewer:** Why did you tell them about the cervical cancer, and not about HIV/AIDS?

**Respondent:** I only told one person, my sister and I didn't tell my mother because she is old and I know she won't feel okay. My sister didn't have any problem when I told her that I'm HIV-positive and I have cancer of the cervix. She was OK and supported me.

**Interviewer:** How did she support you?

**Respondent:** When I'm sick she is with me, she takes care of me. When I need anything she brings it to me. Like, when I need pills she will go and fetch them for me. She understands me a lot, but my mother still doesn't know that I have AIDS.

**Interviewer:** Okay! Is there anything you want to tell me?

**Respondent:** No. There is nothing more. You want me to tell you something like what?

**Interviewer:** In other words, you want to tell me that you have told me everything about your experiences regarding these two illnesses? Actually, I wanted you to tell me more about your life experiences. For example, you can tell me about when you are alone, how you experience cervical cancer and HIV/AIDS.

**Respondent:** I don't even think about this. I would be telling lies.

**Interviewer:** Why do you not think about this?

**Respondent:** I don't know why.

**Interviewer:** You mean that you don't even think that you are HIV and have cervical cancer?

**Respondent:** Aah! I don't even want to think that I'm sick, that one day I will die, I mean such things. I don't think about a lot of things because I know how a person with HIV/AIDS looks. I don't even think about those things because God knows how I'm going to die. I told myself that every person dies. I only worry about my children that when I die, where will they stay, that is the only thing I am worried about.

**Interviewer:** Do you really mean that you are not worried at all about these two diseases?

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What makes you not worry? Is it because they told that you're going to receive the treatment?

**Respondent:** Yes. They told me I'm going to get the treatment.

**Interviewer:** So, what about if they told you that there is no treatment?

**Respondent:** It was going to be painful for that moment because treatment is a good thing. Treatment makes you not have worries. To die without treatment, is what makes a person worry. Anyway I won't leave for a long time. Without receiving treatment will cause you to think the other way: that I will die tomorrow. If you are feeling pains there is nothing that you are going to take to feel better. Some people take their lives because they are always thinking and they don't take care of themselves. You know, I take care of myself because it is a good thing. I take care of myself because this is my life.

**Interviewer:** How do you take care of yourself?

**Respondent:** Like, for example, when I have a problem I explain everything to doctors. I even separated from my boyfriend because this is my life. If you want life, the boyfriend comes second.

**Interviewer:** Ooh, okay! Is there anything that you still want to explain to me?

**Respondent:** You can speak if you want to ask anything.

**Interviewer:** I just wanted to understand your experiences regarding these two illnesses.

**Respondent:** I would be telling lies if I said that I'm feeling any pain.

**Interviewer:** Do you mean emotional pain, when you say that you are not feeling any pain?

**Respondent:** Yeah!

**Interviewer:** So tell me, is it because of the support that you got that now you are not feeling any pain? I want to understand that.

**Respondent:** Now since I came to the Hospital, there is no one who is supporting me because I don't have any friends. I only had one friend who had the same problem. She went for testing and she was found to be positive. So, when she came back she told me. So I didn't have any problem because we are the same. We are all positive.

**Interviewer:** The reason you tell me that you don't have any problem: is it because your friend is positive?

**Respondent:** Yeah! But she is the one who had a problem, and she came and told me. It was a secret, and she didn't want me to tell anyone because you cannot tell anyone anything that you don't trust. You tell somebody who will keep the secret. We are very close friends. She is the one who was encouraging me to also do blood tests. So I went for blood tests because that time I was very sick, and it was not easy for me to do anything. When they told me about my blood results, they explained everything about HIV/AIDS, so I became free. Even now you can see that I'm free.

**Interviewer:** You are saying that you are free. What makes you free?

**Respondent:** I'm free now, I'm talking about it, and don't have worries. I don't have to cry.

**Interviewer:** When you say that you're free now, are you saying that you can tell everybody else about your situation, or only those you are close to?

**Respondent:** I don't have any problem, I do tell people that I'm HIV and I become free. Obviously, a lot of people I know are the same. I'm only worried about young people. You know, I talk a lot.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean when you say that you talk a lot?

**Respondent:** I talk a lot to my best friend, both of us support one another. And again there is a group at Rockville that we met with, at the church, the Lutheran church.

**Interviewer:** The group you're referring to, is it the support group?

**Respondent:** Yeah!

**Interviewer:** Ooh, okay! Because of this support group, even when the doctor told you about cervical cancer, you didn't have any problem?

**Respondent:** Yeah! But since I got sick with cancer I never attended the support group because I've been going a lot to Baragwanath Hospital. So I never talked to them about cervical cancer. The only thing that we talked about is HIV/AIDS. We never talked about cervical cancer to give one another support.

**Interviewer:** Tell me, when you support one another in a group, what are you actually discussing?

**Respondent:** It is like in a class, and we sit in groups, five, five or ten, ten and they give us HIV/AIDS books and we discuss about HIV/AIDS. We talk about that when you are like this, you need to live this way, behave like this, eat this type of food. You see! The main thing is how you are supposed to live.

**Interviewer:** Did the support group help you a lot?

**Respondent:** Yes! But some people do go to support groups, and you find that when they are sitting with the group, they become okay. And when they are alone they think a lot about the disease. You find that today they are OK, and tomorrow they are not.

**Interviewer:** Are you also like that?

**Respondent:** You know me, aah! I am all right, I become strong. Even when I'm alone I'm OK. I won't tell you lies. When I'm alone I won't spend time and say, "Ooh! Now I'm sick. Ooh! I have two illnesses." You don't do that. You know, even my sister will ask that, what kind of a person are you? Sometimes don't you think that because you are suffering from two illnesses, you will die? I just say to her that I will not die. You know, the reason why

people are dying is because they are thinking a lot. I'm only worried about my children, when I die where will they go. I'm only thinking about my children; me, I'm OK.

**Interviewer:** In other words, it is they who are worried about you?

**Respondent:** Yes, me I'm ok, I don't worry a lot about this. It is them who are too worried about me.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything you want to tell me?

**Respondent:** No. I'm through.

**Interviewer:** Okay! Thanks very much for your time.