

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POST TRAUMATIC SYMPTOMS IN MEN  
AND WOMEN NEWLY DIAGNOSED WITH HIV-INFECTION**

by

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**HOLD HANDS**

HIS HANDS HER HANDS

**HONEST HANDS**

HOLY HANDS

**HELPING HANDS**

HAPPY HANDS

**HOPEFUL HANDS**

HUMBLE HANDS

**HEARTY HANDS**

HOLDING HANDS

**OUR HANDS, THE HEARTBEAT  
OF LOVE CARE AND SUPPORT**

**These hands, all our hands joined together light a candle of hope.**

**For all of us touched by HIV/AIDS, our family and the community at large.**

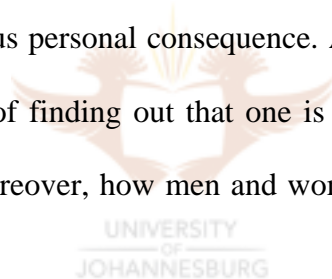
**May this flame burn in remembrance of all people  
who died of AIDS related conditions**

**May our hands be caring hands, loving hands  
And supportive hands**

**WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR HANDS?  
WHAT DO YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS?**

## SUMMARY

It is now well known that HIV/AIDS-sufferers face profound psychological, psychiatric and neurological sequelae as the disease progresses. However, studies indicate that women diagnosed with HIV-infection are twice more likely to be depressed, to suffer from PTSD and other psychiatric morbidity than men. Yet very few studies have attempted to investigate the role that gender plays in reacting to the illness. Finding out that one is HIV-infected is one of the most significant discoveries. This is due to the fact that in receiving an HIV-positive diagnosis individuals are exposed to news of prodigious personal consequence. And yet very few studies have focused on how the impact of finding out that one is HIV-positive may affect their adjustment to the illness. Moreover, how men and women are likely to react to such news.

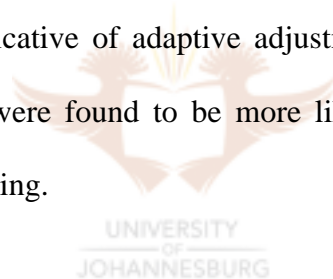


It is against this background that the current study was conducted. The aim of the current study was to compare post traumatic symptoms in men and women upon hearing news of their HIV-positive status and to investigate to what extent such reactions may be similar or different and to further assess how their reactions are likely to affect disease progression and adjustment.

A total of one hundred participants (38 Male, 63 female) diagnosed with HIV/AIDS participated in the study. These men and women were obtained from support groups

in the Gauteng region. The Impact of Event Scale-Revised and Mental Adjustment to HIV-Scale questionnaires were used to collect data over a period of a month.

A large majority of 60.2% of the total sample ( $n = 87$ ) reported experiencing feelings of shock upon hearing about their HIV-positive status, 66.0% of the total sample ( $n = 94$ ) of those who responded to this item reported trying to remove the issue from their mind. A further 59.6% of the total sample of ( $n = 94$ ) indicated feeling as though news about their HIV-positive status were not real suggesting that the incident was traumatic. There were no significant gender differences in how both men and women reacted to news of their HIV-positive diagnosis. However, significant differences were found in relation to adjustment. Men were found to be more likely to have more Fighting Spirit which is indicative of adaptive adjustment as compared to women. Women on the other hand were found to be more likely to be Hopeless which is indicative of maladaptive coping.



The current study findings support the importance of tailoring treatment and prevention messages to incorporate gender issues.

## OPSOMMING

Dit is welbekend dat MIV/VIGS-lyers beduidende sielkundige, psigiatriese en neurologiese gevolge in die gesig staar soos die siekte ontwikkel. Studies toon egter dat vrouens wat gediagnoseer is met die MI-virus twee maal meer geneig is as mans tot depressie, PTSV en ander psigiatriese toestande. Min studies skenk egter aandag aan die rol wat geslag speel in 'n persoon se reaksie tot die siekte. Om met MIV gediagnoseer te word is 'n baie beduidende gebeurtenis. Dit is as gevolg van die skrikwekkende persoonlike gevolge van die persoon in die gesig staar. Tog het baie min studies al gefokus op die impak om uit te vind dat 'n mens MIV-positief is. Meer nog, hoe mans en vrouens geneig sal wees om op die nuus te reageer.

Dit is teen hierdie agtergrond dat die huidige studie geloods is. Die doel van die huidige studie was om die reaksies van mans en vrouens nadat hulle ingelig is van hulle MIV-positiewe status te vergelyk en te bepaal tot watter mate die reaksies mag verskil of ooreenstem. Verder nog is daar ten doel gestel om vas te stel hoe hulle reaksies die siekte se verloop en hul aanpassing mag beïnvloed.

'n Totaal was eenhonderd deelnemers (38 mans, 63 vrouens) wat gediagnoseer is met MIV/VIGS minder as 'n jaar gelede, ouer as 11 jaar het deelgeneem in die studie. Hierdie mans en vrouens is verkry deur ondersteuningsgroepe in die Gauteng-area. Die "Impact of Event Scale-Revised" en die "Mental Adjustment to HIV-Scale" is gebruik om die data oor 'n maandlange periode in te samel.

‘n Groot hoeveelheid (60.2%) van die totale steekproef (n = 87) het gevoelens van skok gerapporteer nadat hulle ingelig is oor hulle MIV-positiewe status terwyl 66% van die totale steekproef (n = 94) probeer het om die saak uit hulle gedagtes te verwyder. ‘n Verdere 59.6% van die totale steekproef (N = 94) het aangedui dat die nuus nie werklik was vir hulle nie wat aanduidend is van ‘n traumatise incident. Daar was geen beduidende geslagsverskille in hoe mans en vrouens tot die nuus van hulle MIV-status gereageer het nie. Beduidende verskille is egter gevind met betrekking tot hulle aanpassing. Mans was meer geneig om ‘n “Fighting Spirit” te toon wat aanduidend is van gesonde aanpassing. Vrouens was meer geneig om gevoelens van hopeloosheid te rapporteer wat aanduidend is van wanaanpassing.

Die huidige studie se bevindinge is in kontras met die van Olley et al (2003) waar hulle psigiatriese ko-morbiditeit, coping response en ongeskiktheid vergelyk het in mans- en vroue-buite-pasiënte wat onlangs met MIV/VIGS gediagnoseer is. Olley et al (2003) het gevind dat terwyl vrouens geneig was om die diagnostiese kriteria van PTSD te ontmoet, ook geneig was om coping strategieë te gebruik wat beskou word as aanpassende strategieë (bv. beplanning en godsdiens). Daarenteen was mans meer geneig om aan die kriteria vir alkoholgebruik of –afhanklikheid te voldoen asook om risikogedrag te toon wat gewoonlik met wanaanpassing geassosieer word. Ander studies toon gemengde resultate.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>PROLOGUE.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>OPSOMMING.....</b>	<b>iv</b>

### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

<b>1.1 HIV/AIDS in context</b>	<b>1-2</b>
<b>1.2 MOTIVATION</b>	<b>3-8</b>
<b>1.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS</b>	<b>8-13</b>
<b>1.4 GENERAL PROBLEM STATEMENT</b>	<b>13-14</b>
<b>1.5 SPECIFIC PROBLEM STATEMENT</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.6 APPLICABILITY OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>15-16</b>
<b>1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	<b>16</b>

### CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

<b>2.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>17-18</b>
-------------------------	--------------

2.1.1 Definition of HIV/AIDS	18-20
2.1.2 Stages of HIV infection	20-22
<b>2.2 DISEASE PROGRESSION.....</b>	<b>22-26</b>
<b>2.3 HIV/AIDS TRANSMISSION.....</b>	<b>26</b>
2.3.1 Global modes of HIV transmission	26-28
2.3.2 Infection rates	29-31
<b>2.4 GENDER DIFFERENCES .....</b>	<b>31-33</b>
2.4.1 Biological/ physical differences	33-35
2.4.2 Gender differences in the survival of men and women with HIV/AIDS	35-36
<b>2.4.3 Gender-based power imbalance and differences</b>	<b>36-40</b>
2.4.3 Economic inequality	40-41
2.4.4 Socio-cultural differences.	42-44
2.4.5 The issue of stigma	44-47
<b>2.4.6 Gender differences in psychological ramification of HIV/AIDS</b>	<b>47-52</b>
<b>2.5 POLITICAL CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH HIV/AIDS AND GENDER ISSUES EXIST</b>	<b>52-55</b>
<b>2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	<b>55-56</b>



## **CHAPTER THREE: PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA AND ADJUSTMENT**

<b>3.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>57-59</b>
<b>3.2. BRIEF HISTORY OF TRAUMA AND DEFINITIONS</b>	<b>59-62</b>
3.2.1 The difference between Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and acute stress disorder (ADS)	62-63
3.2.2 The course of stress response symptoms	63-65
<b>3.2.3 A potential framework for a theory of traumatic stress reaction</b>	<b>65-66</b>
3.2.3.1 Person variables	66-68
3.2.3.2 Environmental and Situational variables	68-69
3.2.3.3 Individual subjective response to trauma	69-70
3.2.3.3.1 <i>Emotional dimension</i>	70-71
3.2.3.3.2 <i>Affect balance</i>	71-72
3.2.3.3.3 <i>Cognitive</i>	72-75
3.2.3.3.4 <i>Motivation</i>	76
3.2.3.3.5 <i>Neurophysiology</i>	76-77
<b>3.3 TRAUMA AND CULTURE</b>	<b>79</b>
3.3.1 Cultural meaning and context in trauma	79--83
<b>3.4 GENDER DIFFERENCES REGARDING REACTION TO TRAUMA AND TRAUMATIC SYMPTOMS</b>	<b>83-87</b>

<b>3.5 ADJUSTMENT AND RESILIENCY</b>	<b>87-88</b>
3.5.1 Conceptualised models of adjustment	88-93
3.5.2 Gender differences in adjustment to trauma	93-95
<b>3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>4.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>96</b>
4.1.1 Research design	96-97
4.1.2 The sample	97-98
4.1.3 Procedure	98-100
<b>4.2 MEASURING INSTRUMENTS</b>	<b>100</b>
4.2.1 The Impact of Event Scale (IES-R)	101-102
4.2.1.1 Reliability	102
4.2.1.2 Validity	102-103
4.2.1.3 Scoring method	104-105
4.2.1.4 Factor analysis for IES-R	105-107
<b>4.2.2 The Mental Adjustment to HIV Scale (Modified version of Mental Adjustment to Cancer Scale)</b>	<b>107-108</b>
4.2.2.1 Reliability	108-109
4.2.2.2 Validity	109-110
4.2.2.3 Factor analysis for MAHIVS	110-111



<b>4.4. PROBLEM STATEMENT</b>	<b>111-112</b>
4.4.1 Hypotheses	112-113
<b>4.4.2 Ethical considerations</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>4.5 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>5.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>5.2 FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF BIOGRAPHICAL VARIABLES</b>	
5.2.1. Age	116
5.2.2 Gender	116-117
5.2.3 Marital status	117-118
5.2.4 Education Level	118
5.2.5 Dependents	119
5.2.6 Duration of the Illness	119-120
5.2.7 Disclosure vs Non Disclosure	120-121
5.2.8 Person(s) to whom disclosure was made to	121-122
5.2.9 Sources of support for those who have disclosed their HIV-positive status	122-123
5.2.10 Reasons for choosing not to disclose one's status	123-124



5.1.11 Employment Status	124
<b>5.3 FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES TO ITEMS ON QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	<b>124-125</b>
5.3.1 Frequency of responses to items on the IES-R	125-129
5.3.2 Frequency of responses to items on the MAHIVS	129-132
<b>5.4 IMPACT OF BIOGRAPHICAL VARIABLES ON IES, FS AND HS</b>	<b>132-133</b>
5.4.1 Age	132-133
5.4.2 Marital Status	133-134
5.4.3 Education	135-136
5.4.4 Duration of Illness	136-137
5.4.5 Employment Status	137-138
5.4.6 Children	138-139
5.4.7 Disclosure vs Non Disclosure	139-140
<b>5.5 GENDER DIFFERENCES.....</b>	<b>140</b>
5.5.1 Gender differences with regards to the Impact of Events Scale Revised (IES-R)	140-141
5.5.2 Gender differences with regard to the Mental Adjustment to HIV Scale (MAHIVS)	141-143
<b>5.6 CORRELATIONS</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	<b>143</b>



<b>CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>6.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>144</b>
6.1 Biographical data	144-145
6.2 Disclosure versus non disclosure	145-147
6.3 Reactions upon receiving news of HIV-positive diagnosis	147-148
6.4 Gender differences regarding traumatic reaction upon receiving news of an HIV-positive diagnosis	148-155
<b>6.4 HIV/AIDS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT</b>	<b>155-162</b>
<b>6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY</b>	<b>162-163</b>
<b>6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>164-165</b>
<b>6.7 EPILOGUE</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>166-199</b>



**APPENDIX 1:**

- **RESEARCHER'S LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS**
- **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**APPENDIX 2:**

- **IMPACT OF EVENT SCALE-REVISED (IES-R)**
- **MENTAL ADJUSTMENT TO HIV-SCALE (MAHIVS)**





**LIST OF TABLES**

- TABLE 4.1 First order analysis for IES-R**
- TABLE 4.2 First order analysis for MAHIVS**
- TABLE 5.1 Frequency distribution of Age**
- TABLE 5.2 Frequency distribution of Gender**
- TABLE 5.3 Frequency distribution of Marital Status**
- TABLE 5.4 Frequency distribution of Level of Education**
- TABLE 5.5 Frequency distribution of Dependents**
- TABLE 5.6 Frequency distribution for Duration of Illness**
- TABLE 5.7 Frequency distribution of Disclosure vs Non Disclosure**
- TABLE 5.8 Frequency distribution of Person to whom disclosure was made**
- TABLE 5.9 Frequency distribution for Sources of Support for those who have disclosed**
- TABLE 5.10 Frequency distribution of Reasons for not disclosing**
- TABLE 5.11 Frequency distribution for Employment Status**
- TABLE 5.12 Impact of Event Scale Revised (IES-R)**
- TABLE 5.13 Mental Adjustment to HIV Scale (MAHIVS)**
- TABLE 5.14 Significant differences in mean scores of men and women on the IES-R**
- TABLE 5.15 Significant differences in mean scores of men and women in terms of Fighting Spirit**
- TABLE 5.16 Significant differences in mean scores of men and women in terms of Hopelessness**

**TABLE 5.17 ANOVA with regard to Age**

**TABLE 5.18 ANOVA with regard to Marital Status**

**TABLE 5.19 ANOVA with regard to Education**

**TABLE 5.20 ANOVA with regard to Duration of Illness**

**TABLE 5.21 ANOVA with regard to Employment Status**

**TABLE 5.22 T-test results with regard to whether participants indicated that they had children younger than 10 years**

**TABLE 5.23 T-test results with regard to whether participants indicated that they had children younger than 18 years**

**TABLE 5.24 T-test results with regard to whether participants indicated that they had disclosed their HIV status or not**

**TABLE 5.25 Correlation matrix of the IES-R scale and the subscales of the MAHIVS**



**List of figures**

**Figure 3.1 Interactional Model to traumatic response**