HIV Meds Greatly Benefit South Africans, But Favor Women

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In the decade since South Africa finally reversed policy and expanded antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for people with HIV, the population has posted enormous gains in life expectancy, although women have experienced the benefits far more than men, MedPage Today reports. Researchers analyzed demographic data on 52,964 women and 45,688 men that was collected by the Africa Centre for Health and Population Studies in KwaZulu-Natal province between 2000 and 2011. They presented their findings at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Boston.

A total of 6,140 women died during the study, for a mortality rate of 1.85 per person-years. A total of 6,150 men died, for a mortality rate of 2.17 per 100 person-years. Among these deaths, 3,729 of the women's were related to HIV, for an HIV mortality rate of 1.12 per 100 person years. A total of 3,500 of the men's deaths were HIV related, for an HIV mortality rate of 1.23 per 100 person years.

Across the board, the longevity of South Africans with HIV who survived childhood rose from about 50 to 60 years old between 2004 and 2011. For men, the average longevity rose from 46 to 55 years old. The average for women elevated from 50 to 64 years old. The longevity gap between the sexes has vacillated over time: In 2001, it was nearly seven years, then dropped to less than four years by 2006, only to rise to more than eight years today.

The investigators found that South African women were 2.5-times more likely to use ARVs than men, which may partly account for the discrepancy in longevity. Seventy percent of the men who died of HIV-related causes had never taken therapy for the virus.

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