HIV-Positive Women Report More Signs of Premature Aging than Men

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Eighty percent of HIV-positive women in one study felt that they were aging prematurely, compared with less than 20 percent of HIV-positive men, according to researchers presenting at the First International Workshop on HIV and Aging, being held October 4 and 5 in Baltimore, and reported by the National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project (NATAP).

A number of studies suggest people with HIV are experiencing health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline and bone loss—all of which most commonly strike elderly people—at a much younger age than HIV-negative individuals. Scientists are still trying to understand the reasons for this phenomenon, but some have stated that these types of statistics suggest premature aging among people with HIV.

To better understand how people who have been infected with HIV for at least 15 years perceive their health in regards to a number of age-related symptoms, researchers at the Germans Trias i Pujol Hospital in Barcelona surveyed 100 HIV-positive people. The study participants, who had been infected for an average of 18.5 years, answered questions about 19 aging-related symptoms.

Sixty of the participants were men and 40 were women. Their average age was 48 and most had virus levels below 25 copies. About 40 percent also were infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV). On average, their current CD4 count was 573 and their lowest-ever CD4 count was 198.

Reports of age-related symptoms were common. Overall, more than 90 percent reported fatigue and more than 80 percent reported joint pain, memory loss and difficulty concentrating. Other common symptoms included anxiety, depression, difficulty sleeping and loss of sexual interest.

Women in the study reported the greatest number of symptoms. What's more, they were more likely to report symptoms of greater intensity.

Overall, 80 percent of the women felt that they were aging prematurely compared with 18 percent of men. Women were also about a third more likely than men to report that their symptoms limited their personal life and work activity.

According to the researchers, women often report more clinical and psychological complaint than men and the high rate of HCV coinfection could also have affected the results. However, NATAP also reports that, "The researchers believe their results suggest that women 'could be more vulnerable to the impact of these clinical manifestations' than men."

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