Older Women With HIV Appear to Be Aging Successfully

Researchers surveyed HIV-positive women age 50 and older and compared their reports about their aging with those of HIV-negative women.

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HIV-positive women age 50 and older typically experience so-called successful aging at a rate on par with their HIV-negative peers, a recent survey study found.

Anna A. Rubtsova, PhD, of the department of behavioral sciences and health education at Emory University in Atlanta, and colleagues analyzed survey data regarding 386 women living with HIV who were 50 years old or older and 137 HIV-negative control women at risk for the virus.

The women were participants in the Women's Interagency HIV Study and engaged in the From Surviving to Thriving substudy, in which women were surveyed about their experience with aging.

Self-rated successful aging (SRSA) was defined by individuals' own assessment. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most successful, women in the study were asked, "Using your own definition, where would you rate yourself in terms of 'successful aging?'" They were also asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with the statement "I am aging well" and to rate their current life on a scale of 1 to 10.

The women were 57 years old on average. Nearly three quarters were African American, 38% had at most a high school education and 30% were unemployed. Compared with the women living with the virus, the HIV-negative women were more likely to have an income of no more than $6,000 and to lack health insurance and had a lower rate of optimism and health-related quality of life.

Ninety-four percent of the HIV-positive women were on antiretroviral treatment, and 73% had an undetectable viral load.

The study authors found no significant difference in SRSA between the two study groups, with 84% of the women living with the virus and 83% of those without reporting a SRSA of at least 7.

An SRSA score of 7 or greater was associated with higher levels of positive psychological characteristics, such as resilience and optimism, among members of both study groups.

“SRSA is achievable among older women with and at risk of HIV despite health complications,” the study authors concluded. “Among disadvantaged women, factors other than HIV may be primary drivers of SRSA. Future research is needed to examine determinants of SRSA and to design public health interventions enhancing [successful aging] within this population.”

To read the study abstract, click here.

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