

Disease interpretations and response among hiv-positive mothers

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Abstrak

Despite the growing number of new cases of HIV and AIDS in Indonesia, the progress of prevention programs has been slow. Low prevalence is always stated as a reason for delaying HIV prevention programs and to justify slow progress in implementation. Prevention programs are moreover based on a high-risk group paradigm. They focus on female sex workers as responsible for the spread of HIV, leading to its stigmatization as a hooker's disease. This article describes how seropositive mothers interpret and respond to HIV and AIDS as women, in light of the fact that most of them have not experienced full-blown AIDS. Some women had already experienced severe illnesses caused by HIV but defined their ill health by the symptoms they experienced, revealing that they did not really feel as if they were living with HIV and AIDS. Despite the fact that some members had died due to AIDS, many still could not believe that they were suffering from HIV and AIDS or that their illnesses were caused by it; rather, their symptoms were of other diseases such as diarrhoea, tuberculosis, or hepatitis. And though they realized that their past (or present) behaviours put them at risk, they maintained that they were victims who had contracted the disease from their promiscuous or drug-injecting husbands. Even when they did admit that their own behaviour had something to do with it, they did not consider HIV and AIDS as a disease but a curse from God, a punishment for their immoral behaviour.

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