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Women, Mental Health, and HIV

Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

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What is Mental Health?

- Refers to emotional, psychological, social well-being
- Affects the way people think, feel, act
- Helps determine how people handle stress, relate to others, make choices
- Good mental health is a sense of well-being, confidence, self-esteem
- Mental health problems can change how well people function at work/home

Mental Health and HIV

- For people living with HIV (PLWH), mental health problems can affect physical health; can
 - Make it harder to take HIV medications on time
 - Make it harder to keep appointments/take advantage of support network
 - Interfere with healthy behaviors
 - Impair ability to cope with the stresses of daily life
- PLWH at higher risk to develop mood, anxiety, cognitive disorders
 - Conditions are treatable
 - ***People who experience mental health problems can get better and many recover completely!!***

What Is Depression?

Being depressed:

When someone feels down, sad, blue, unhappy, hopeless

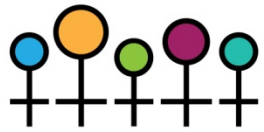
These are all ***normal feelings; almost everyone*** experiences them sometimes



If these feelings become overpowering, disabling, or long-lasting, they may be a sign of **depression**

What Is Depression?

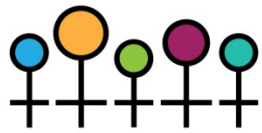
- **Compared to sadness, depression is:**
 - More intense
 - Lasts longer (more than 2 weeks)
 - Interferes with your day-to-day ability to function
 - A diagnosis based on having certain # of specific symptoms
 - Not a normal part of living with HIV
 - Can cause some serious health problems
- Consult health care provider if:
 - Showing symptoms of depression (next slide)
 - Unsure if feelings you are experiencing are normal



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Some Symptoms of Depression

- Changes in appetite or weight, and/or sleeping patterns
- Aches or pains for no clear reason
- Episodes of crying for no clear reason
- Feeling sadness, guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness
- Irritability; getting into arguments easily
- Lack of pleasure in activities that usually interest you
- Low sex drive
- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Thoughts of harming oneself or committing suicide



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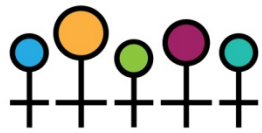
Some Symptoms of Depression

- Not taking care of yourself in terms of grooming, dressing, and personal hygiene
- Skipping or not going to work, calling in sick
- Being very critical and down on yourself
- Not talking to or going out with friends
- Not joining your usual social activities or hobbies
- Crying or feeling like crying more often than normal
 - Often without knowing why
- Using more alcohol or other recreational drugs
 - ***Sometimes substance use hides depression*** (self-medicating)

Women and Depression

Women are ***2x as likely to be depressed than men*** – possibly due to:

- Burden many women bear as primary caregiver
- Having less household income, education, social support
- Strong link between depression and violence against women (physical, sexual, or emotional)
- Depression also linked to ***increasing young women's risk of getting HIV***



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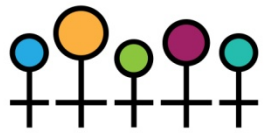
Depression in Women Living with HIV

Women living with HIV (WLHIV) ***even more likely to suffer from depression***

- Getting an HIV diagnosis is life-changing; can be difficult to hear and accept; some may feel:
 - Overwhelmed, helpless, unable to cope with an HIV diagnosis
 - Afraid for future health, disclosing HIV status to friends, family
- The stigma that many women living with HIV experience may lead to social isolation and loneliness
- All these feelings are key elements of depression

Depression in WLHIV

- Many women living with HIV experience other ***large life stressors*** that can lead to depression:
 - Racial discrimination
 - Poverty
 - Violence
 - Single parenthood
- HIV itself may contribute directly to depression
 - People living with HIV (PLHIV) who have HIV in cerebral-spinal fluid that surrounds their brain and spinal cord are almost 5x more likely to experience new-onset depression

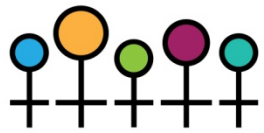


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Depression and Older WLHIV

As ***HIV treatments have improved***, more and more older women are living with HIV

- Growing older often involves its own life challenges that can lead to feelings of sadness or depression:
 - Chronic disease
 - Disability
 - Loss of loved ones
- One study showed that ***more than 6 in 10 WLHIV ages 50 - 76 years old*** suffered from depression



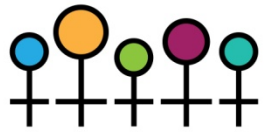
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Depression Can Cause Serious Problems

Studies show direct connection between depression and poorer health for those living with HIV

WLHIV who are depressed:

- Seek HIV care less often
- Have more trouble sticking with their HIV drug regimens
- Have more rapid disease progression
- May miss drug doses, take wrong dose, or dose at wrong time
- Not taking HIV drugs regularly can lead to the development of resistance, leading CD4 count to drop and/or viral load to go up



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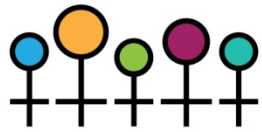
Getting Help Can Make a Big Difference

- One study showed risk of death cut in half for those women who made contact with a mental health provider
- Important that depression be ***diagnosed and treated as quickly as possible*** to avoid serious problems

Treatment Options

The good news is that ***depression is treatable***

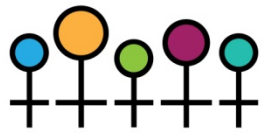
- While it is true that depression can get better on its own, this can take months or even years
- Treatment will likely shorten the time it takes to feel better and may help with adherence to HIV drugs
- Treating depression can help from losing a job, a relationship, or even one's life



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Psychotherapy

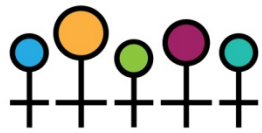
- Various mental health professionals can provide *psychotherapy*
- Talking to a trained professional about what you are experiencing
- Therapist provides support, helps you understand what is troubling you
- Most psychotherapy occurs one-on-one; group therapy can also be helpful for some
- In U.S., mental health professionals who provide psychotherapy include psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors



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Antidepressant Medications

- Often prescribed for depression or anxiety
- Many antidepressant and anti-anxiety drugs can interact with some HIV drugs
 - Talk to your provider before starting any new medications
 - Generally safest type of antidepressants for use with HIV drugs is **selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs)**:
 - Celexa (citalopram), Lexapro (escitalopram), Luvox (fluvoxamine), Prozac (fluoxetine), Paxil (paroxetine), and Zoloft (sertraline)
 - DO NOT take St. John's Wort (popular herbal antidepressant)
 - Affects immune system; interacts with many HIV drugs



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Get Checked and Treated for Depression

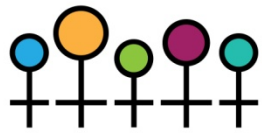
- If experiencing symptoms of depression:
 - Talk to provider
 - Ask for referral to see a mental health professional
 - Can improve your health, quality of life, including adherence
- While some don't believe in mental health care, problems or injuries require treatment, whether they are physical or mental
 - When we experience emotional difficulty, ***there is no need to suffer when effective treatment is available***

Stress Management

- Everyone deals with a certain amount of stress
- For WLHIV, stress can become overwhelming
 - High stress can damage your immune system, cause physical/emotional illnesses
 - Research shows stress can speed up progression of HIV

Physical Signs of Stress

- Allergies
- Change in appetite
- Back pain
- High blood pressure
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Clammy hands
- More colds than normal
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Racing heartbeat
- Muscle tension
- Nightmares
- Rashes
- Restlessness
- Sleeping problems
- Stomach aches



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Emotional and Behavioral Signs of Stress

Emotional

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Denial of a problem
- Difficulty making decisions
- Loneliness
- Nervousness
- Feeling powerless
- Feeling rejected
- Feeling trapped
- Feeling unhappy for no reason
- Being easily upset
- Worrying frequently

Behavioral

- Increasing alcohol, tobacco, drug use
- Not tending to physical appearance
- Arguing with friends or family
- Avoiding tasks and responsibilities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Crying easily
- Being late to work
- Eating too much or not enough
- Snapping at people
- Watching more TV
- Withdrawing from family/friends

Decreasing Stress

- While you may not be able to remove your stressors, remember that you are human and understand you need help
- Make a list of:
 - Areas in which you feel overwhelmed and need help
 - Who or what can help
 - How to get available services

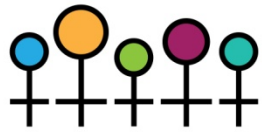
Finding Help

Free or low cost services that can help with stress include:

- Medical services
- Counseling/ psychological help
- Child care
- Taxi rides
- Bus passes
- Acupuncture
- Yoga classes
- Community college classes
- Massage
- Support groups
- Dating services for people living with HIV
- Free computers
- Legal services
- Drug and alcohol programs

Social Support

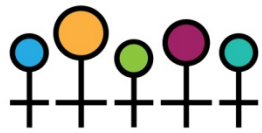
- For all areas of mental health, it may also be helpful to ***seek support of other WLHIV***
 - Support groups
 - Peer counseling
 - The Well Project's online blog for women living with HIV, *A Girl Like Me*
- Social support from friends and family has been found to help people with HIV avoid depression, cope better
 - Friends and family can also provide emotional support



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Other Treatment

- Meditation, massage, yoga, breathing, relaxation exercises can help with mental health, depression, stress
- Acupuncture and acupressure therapies may help reduce stress, improve mood
- Mindfulness techniques may help you get back in touch with what makes life worth living
 - Some have been combined with traditional psychotherapy, shown very effective (e.g., mindfulness-based cognitive therapy)
- Good nutrition and physical activity are beneficial, no matter which treatments are chosen



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Learn More!

- To learn more, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
 - [Depression, Women, and HIV](#)
 - [Stress Management](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - www.thewellproject.org
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.twitter.com/thewellproject