

False positives in testing asymptomatic HSV-2 and the lack of health literacy to change it.

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Introduction

African American females have a 50% chance of an asymptomatic herpes simplex virus type 2 diagnosis, yet are highly unaware of the susceptibility or false positives associated with testing (Jackson & Arcelay-Rojas, 2021).

Materials and methods

Seven semi-structured face-to-face virtual interviews were conducted. Fulton County, GA was selected due to the highest number of STI cases in the state. Flyers were placed at Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).

Literature cited

Jackson, C. & Arcelay-Rojas. (2021). Experiences of African American women living with herpes simplex virus 2. *Journal of Social, Behavioral, & Health Sciences* 15(1), 345-362.

Results

Table 1. Emergent Themes Aligned With Research Questions

Research questions	Emergent themes
<i>RQ1:</i> What is the experience of herpes simplex virus 2 (HSV-2) for African American females, ages 18–59, living in, or diagnosed in, Fulton County, GA, who were asymptomatic prior to being diagnosed?	Health risk perceptions Prevention methods Feelings related to stigma and acceptance
<i>RQ2:</i> What barriers and challenges do African American females, ages 18–59, living in, or diagnosed in, Fulton County, GA experience during conversations with health-care providers about HSV-2?	Frustrations with testing Fear of judgment by health-care providers

Table 2. Description of Participants' Demographics

Participant	Age	Level of School	Marital Status
P1	34	Master's degree	Single
P2	51	Master's degree	Divorced
P3	44	Master's degree	Single
P4	33	Master's degree	Single
P5	43	Master's degree	Dating
P6	45	Some college	Dating
P7	41	Doctoral degree	Dating

Theme 1: Health Risk Perceptions

- African Americans disproportionately impacted by STIs
- All participants randomly discovered their diagnosis

Theme 2: Prevention Methods

- Uncomfortable condom discussions
- Comfort with unprotected sex once committed

Theme 3: Feelings Related to Stigma and Acceptance

- Fear and discomfort of diagnosis disclosure

Theme 4: Frustrations with Testing

- Not tested for HSV-2 without symptomology
- Current testing models produce false positives

Theme 5: Fear of Judgment by Health Care Providers

- Discomfort even if with African American Provider
- Health literacy is a barrier to accountability

Conclusions

There is no evidence that asymptotically diagnosing HSV-2 with a blood test would stop the spread or change sexual behaviors to prevent the virus. In fact, the interviews and research reflect that perceived commitment and emotional connection decrease condom use (Jackson & Arcelay-Rojas, 2021).

Health education programs could encourage health care providers to initiate more conversations about HSV-2 to acknowledge that the lack of health literacy and mistrust for the health care prevents African Americans from discussing or preventing this diagnosis.

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Further information

Please see <https://doi.org/10.5590/JSBHS.2021.15.1.23> for full article. I'm at contact@SheerLLC.com if you have a question or comment. Thank you!