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ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand how Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS perceive themselves and build relationships through interpersonal communication. Specifically, the study (1) identified the central themes on the self-concept of Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS; (2) described their experiences of interaction and communication with other people; and (3) identified the different types of relationships that they have with other people. The study was guided by Grounded Theory and Theoretical Sampling was used in the selection of research participants.

The selected participants were four Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS who were classified under the category, Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM). Narrative interviews and observation were the main data gathering methods used. The self-concept themes that were gathered were classified into two core categories: 1) The Negative "I", and 2) The Positive "I". In the attempt to describe the experiences of interaction and interpersonal communication, it was realized that interpersonal communication and relationship are in fact interrelated. The common forms and experiences of interaction and communication that they have with others include: 1) Verbal communication and face-to-face interaction (Dyadic or Small Group Communication); 2) non-verbal cues such as hugging, smiling, and touching 3) online communication or Computer-mediated Communication (CMC), such as social media, the internet, and group chats and even 4) Public Communication. The four types of relationships that were derived are: 1) The First Line, 2) The Small Circle, 3) The Online Friends and 4) The Others. These types of relationships were further classified into two categories: 1) Close-Open and 2) The Consensus Reality. Close-Open explains that PLHIV would always feel the need to open up to the people they have a close relationship with, while the Consensus Reality explains that PLHIV would usually be comfortable in talking about HIV/AIDS with people who are not close to them but are also experiencing the same case. The levels and forms of communication in these types of relationships were further explained.

The study realized that Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS value interpersonal communication and relationships and these also affect their self-concept. It also delved into open communication and interpersonal communication in the case of PLHIV. Face-to-face communication and Computer-mediated communication are both important in the communication of PLHIV with other people. The types and forms of communication also vary depending on the level or intimacy of relationships. Future research may be done on the other classification of PLHIV besides MSM. Other researchers can also consider study focusing on the other end of the spectrum to understand how they treat or deal with PLHIV, or a health communication study on activities and tools that can help in raising awareness and stopping stigma in the Philippines.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, PLHIV, Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS, Self-concept, Interpersonal Communication, Relationship, MSM, Men who have sex with men, Alter, Ground Theory