

# Best Practices and Self-Care to Support Women in Living Well with Human Immunodeficiency Virus/AIDS



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## KEYWORDS

- HIV positive • Women • Gender inequality • Substance abuse • Violence
- Depression • Best practices • Self-care

## KEY POINTS

- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection among women in the United States has declined overall but is still a formidable health problem, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable women.
- African American, Latino, and other racial/ethnic minority women bear the greatest burden of HIV/AIDS in the United States.
- The higher prevalence of HIV in US black and Latino communities accounts for the disproportionate incidence of this infection in black and Latino women.
- Challenges faced more often by HIV-positive women include poverty, poor-quality education, depression, and trauma.
- Psychosocial assessments and interventions are fundamental to the overall care and promotion of health in HIV-positive women.

## INTRODUCTION

This article highlights characteristics and needs of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-positive women in the United States and discusses best practices and self-care to achieve optimal health in this population. In particular, the article focuses on racial and ethnic minority women and women experiencing challenges known to be

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social determinants of health, that is, poverty, lack of insurance, poor-quality education, homelessness, substance abuse, violence, and discrimination, because such women are disproportionately affected by HIV. It is important to develop not only gender-appropriate but also culturally competent care when partnering with HIV-positive women.<sup>1</sup>

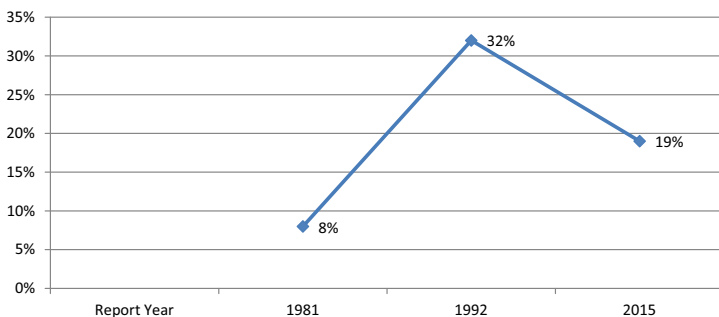
### ***Human Immunodeficiency Virus/AIDS in United States Women***

The incidence of HIV infection for women in the United States was initially low, increased dramatically during the late 1980s, peaked in the early 1990s, and began to decline several years into the 2000s<sup>2,3</sup> (Fig. 1). From 2005 to 2014, the incidence of HIV in this group dropped by 40%.<sup>4</sup> The total number of HIV-positive women in the United States by the end of 2014 was 230,360<sup>5</sup> and, in 2015, women accounted for 19% of new HIV infections and 24% of new AIDS diagnoses.<sup>2,5</sup> Of the 1,216,917 cumulative AIDS cases in the United States, women make up 20% or 248,270.<sup>2</sup>

Rates of HIV/AIDS in US women clearly demonstrate racial and ethnic disparities. African American women bear the heaviest burden of new and existing HIV/AIDS diagnoses. Their rates per 100,000 for new HIV and AIDS diagnoses were 26.2 and 16.2 in 2015 compared with 1.6 and 0.9 for non-Latino white women.<sup>5</sup> Black women represented 60% of all US women living with HIV as recently as 2014 and accounted for 64% of new HIV infections in women in 2015.<sup>2,6,7</sup> Although Latina women have HIV/AIDS rates far below those of African American women,<sup>5</sup> this group has also been disproportionately affected. Latinas had 4 times the likelihood of being diagnosed with HIV compared with non-Latino white women by 2013<sup>3</sup> and, at the end of 2014, represented 17% of HIV-positive women in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Like African American and Latino women, women from other minority groups living in the United States had higher rates of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses in 2015 than non-Latino white women<sup>5</sup> (Table 1).

### ***Why Are Minority Women Affected More by Human Immunodeficiency Virus?***

That black, Latina, and some other racial/ethnic minority women in the United States have been disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS does not mean they engage in higher-risk activities than non-Latino white women.<sup>3</sup> What explains their higher rates of HIV infection is that they choose partners (either sexual, drug use, or both) largely from their own racial and ethnic communities that have higher prevalence of HIV; thus, these women are more likely than non-Latino white women to be exposed to HIV.<sup>2,3,8</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Incidence of HIV in US women. (Data from The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. A report on women and HIV/AIDS in the United States 2013. Available at: <http://www.womenhiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/KFF-2013-report-on-women-and-HIV.pdf>. Accessed June 12, 2017.)

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