

## **Sexual Communication Of People Living With Hiv/Aids**

**By**

**Wiwik Novianti**

Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia

Corresponding Author E.mail: [Wiwik.Novianti@Unsoed.Ac.Id](mailto:Wiwik.Novianti@Unsoed.Ac.Id)

ORCID ID: <https://Orcid.Org/0000-0001-8419-0136>

**S. Bakti Istiyanto**

Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia

E.mail: [Bakti.Istiyanto@Unsoed.Ac.Id](mailto:Bakti.Istiyanto@Unsoed.Ac.Id)

ORCID ID: <https://Orcid.Org/0000-0002-9031-8666>

**Wisnu Widjanarko**

Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia

E.mail: [Wisnuwidjanarko@Unsoed.Ac.Id](mailto:Wisnuwidjanarko@Unsoed.Ac.Id)

ORCID ID: <https://Orcid.Org/0000-0002-9396-2589>

**Mite Setiansah**

Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia

E.mail: [Mite.Setiansah@Unsoed.Ac.Id/](mailto:Mite.Setiansah@Unsoed.Ac.Id/)

ORCID ID: <https://Orcid.Org/0000-0002-7623-5581>

**Nuryanti**

Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia

E.mail: [Nuryanti1510@Unsoed.Ac.Id/](mailto:Nuryanti1510@Unsoed.Ac.Id/)

ORCID ID: <https://Orcid.Org/0000-0002-7233-7628>

### **Abstract**

People Living With Hiv/Aids (Plha) Often Become Stigmatized Subjects Due To Their Illness. One Of Hiv/Aids Transmission Media Is Through Sexual Contact. Therefore It Is Interesting To Study How Sexual Communication Among Plha To Maintain Their Romantic Relationships. This Research Was Conducted In Kebumen Regency Since The Number Of Plha In This Region Was The Highest In Central Java. The Purpose Of This Study Was To Determine The Sexual Communication Performed By Plha In Order To Maintain A Romantic Relationship With Their Partners. This Research Used A Phenomenological Method To Explore The Sexual Communication Experienced By Plha. The Research Data Were Collected Using In-Depth Interview, Observation, And Document Analysis. This Study Found That The Status Of Participants, In This Case, People Living With Hiv/Aids, Affected Their Sexuality. They Became More Careful In Having Sexual Relations And Respectful To Their Partners. The Participants Viewed Hiv/Aids As A Warning And Test To Become A Better Human Being. All Participants Who Were Married Were Open To Their Partners Related To The Pain And Complaints They Have Suffered From And Felt. Meanwhile, The Participants Who Have Already Become Widow Felt That Hiv/Aids Has Become An Obstacle To Find A New Partner. The Plha Status Has Made Those Participants Were In Hesitation To Make A Serious Romantic Relationship. Sexual Intercourse Is No Longer A Top Priority For Plha Couples. The Couples' Willingness To Look After, Care, And Love Each Other Even Hit By The Stigma From The Society Was A Gift To Thank For.

**Keywords:** Sexual Communication, Sexuality, People Living With Hiv/Aids (Plha), Romantic Relationships

## **Introduction**

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids) Is A Collection Of Symptoms And Infections Arising From Damaged Body Immune System Because Of Attack By Human Immunodeficiency Virus (Hiv). One Medium Of Hiv/Aids Transmission Is Through Sexual Contact. Therefore, For Their Partner Not To Get Infected, People Living With Hiv/Aids (Plha) Attempt To Use Condom In Sexual Intercourse, Not Making Penetration Or Not Making Sexual Intercourse At All (Astuti And Rayasari, 2017). Adaptation Between The Disease One Has And His Sexual Behavior Is An Issue Not Only For Plha, But Also Their Partner.

In Indonesia, Discussing Sex Is Taboo And Considered Dirty, An Inappropriate Topic For Discussion Even For Married Couples. Meanwhile, The Study Conducted By Chandrasari (2009) Shows That The Higher The Sexual Communication, The Higher The Level Of Satisfaction Of A Marriage Is. Therefore, The Researcher Was Interested In Reviewing How Plha Make Sexual Communication With Their Partner, Considering That Sexual Desire Is Human's Basic Need, But The Existing Conditions Force Plha To Make Choices Of Sexual Intercourse Which May Be Not Comfortable For Them And Their Partner.

Sexual Communication Covers Self-Expression Of Sexual Acts Desired Or Not Desired And Sexual Matters Preferred And Not Preferred By A Romantic Couple (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Sexual Communication Is Closely Related To Self-Openness To Partner. Not All People Are Able To Open Up To Their Partner Regarding Their Sexual Conditions Or Preferences. Reluctance To Open Up Sexually To Partner Inflicts Quite Serious Impact On A Relationship. An Ex-Prostitute Said That Most Men Using Her Service Were They Who Were Unable To Express Their Sexual Preferences To Their Wife (Novianti, 2017).

Based On Unaid's Data, There Were 36.9 Million People Living With Hiv/Aids Many Countries In 2017 (Kompas.Com, 1 December 2018). In Indonesia, There Were 640,443 People Living With Hiv/Aids (Plha) Until June 2018 (Depkes.Go.Id, 1 December 2018). This Research Was Conducted In Kebumen Regency, Central Java. There Were 19,272 Plha In Central Java In 2018, Making It The Fourth Highest In Indonesia After Dki Jakarta, East Java And Papua (Rri.Co.Id, 22 November 2018). Kebumen Regency Is An Area In Central Java With A High Number Of Plha, And Even In The First Semester Of 2017 It Took The First Place In The Number Of People Living With Hiv-Aids In Central Java (Suaramerdeka.Com, 1 November 2017). Until June 2018, There Were 1176 People Living With Hiv/Aids In Kebumen Regency (Radarbanyumas.Co.Id, 31 July 2018). The High Number Of People Living With Hiv/Aids In Kebumen Regency Had The Researcher Interested In Conducting A Research In The Area.

This Research Attempts To Have An Overview Of The Sexual Communication Made By People Living With Hiv/Aids In Effort To Establish A Romantic Intercourse And Increase Satisfaction In Intercourse.

Human Sexuality Is Complex. According To The World Health Organization (Who), Sexuality Is The Central Aspect Of Human Life Including Sex, Gender Identity And Role, Sexual Orientation, Eroticism, Pleasure, Intimacy And Reproduction. Sexuality Is Experienced And Expressed In Mind, Fantasies, Desires, Beliefs, Attitudes, Values, Behaviors, Practices, Roles And Relationship. However, Not All Of The Dimensions Are Always Experienced Or

Expressed. Sexuality Is Influenced By Interactions Of Biological, Psychological, Social, Economic, Political, Cultural, Ethical, Legal, Historical, Religious And Spiritual Factors (Pinar & Jolly, 2007).

Sexual Communication Covers Self-Openness Of Sexual Acts Desired Or Not Desired And Preferred Or Not Preferred By A Couple (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Many Couples Perform Sexual Communication To Express Their Frustration And Or Satisfaction To Each Other For Adaptation. Communication On Sexual Topics Is Important In A Romantic Relationship Since It Helps Express Sexual Desire, And May Become The Main Factor To Determine Sexual Satisfaction And Relationship (Faulkner & Lannuti, 2010).

This Research Focuses On The Sexual Communication Of People Living With Hiv/Aids. From Previous Researches, It Is Found That When A Person Is Diagnosed As Getting Infected By Hiv/Aids, Their Sexual Behaviors Also Change. Such Change Includes Change To The Frequency Of Sexual Intercourse, Change To Sexual Function And Change To The Form Of Sexual Behaviors (Sari, Subronto And Lismidianti, 2016). For The Partner To Remain Comfortable, Such Changes Must Be Well Communicated By Plha To The Partner.

Having A Harmonious And Happy Relationship Is Each And Every Person's Wish, Including Plha. Therefore, It Is Important For Plha's Partner To Create Harmony Amidst The Stigma Covering Their Life. One Stigma Of Plha Is That They Have Weak And Helpless Physical Conditions (Fitrananda, 2015). The Stigma Also Affects Plha In Their Romantic Relationship. How Would Plha Build Their Confidence That They Are Able To Satisfy Their Partner Despite Having Illness?

Harmony Is The Result Of A Mutually Supporting And Strengthening Relationship (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). It Is Interesting To Study How Plha Creates Harmony With Their Partner Through Sexual Openness.

## **Research Method**

This Qualitative Research Employed A Phenomenological Approach. The Qualitative Method Was Employed To Explore And Understand The Meaning Which—By A Number Of Individuals Or Groups Of People—Is Deemed To Be Derived From Social Or Humanitarian Issue.

The Process Of Qualitative Research Involves Important Efforts Such As Asking Questions And Proposing Procedures, Collecting Specific Data From Participants, Analyzing Data Inductively, And Interpreting The Meaning Of Data. The Final Report For This Research Had A Flexible Structure. Anyone Involved In This Form Of Research Must Apply Inductive-Styled Research Perspective, Focus On Individual Meaning, And Interpret The Complexity Of An Issue (Creswell, 2010:5).

This Research Attempted To Describe And Review The Sexual Communication Of People Living With Hiv/Aids, Thus Phenomenological Approach Was Employed. A Study With Phenomenological Approach Attempts To Explain The Meaning Of The Life Experience Of A Number Of People Regarding A Concept Or Symptom (Kuswarno, 2009:127).

In The Research, The Researcher Collected The Data Through In-Depth Interview, Non-Participant Observation, And Document Analysis. In-Depth Interview Was Conducted In

Order To Explore The Research Participants' Subjective Meaning Related To Their Sexual Communication With Their Partner.

The Researcher Also Collected The Data Through Non-Participant Observation. Observation Was Needed In The Research To Give The Interview Result A Context, Such As Observation Of Participant's Behaviors During Interview And Participant's Interaction With The Researcher.

The Researcher Also Collected Documents Such As Journal Articles, Newspapers, Or Reports Of Researches Which Were Relevant To The Research's Theme In Order To Enrich The Data.

The Data Analysis Technique Employed In The Research Was Phenomenology As Described By Creswell (2013:190-191) In Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Data Analysis and Presentation Based On Phenomenological Approach*

<b>Data Analysis And Representation</b>	<b>Phenomenology</b>
Data Organization	Create And Organize Files For Data
Reading, Memoing	Read Through Text, Make Margin Notes, Form Initial Codes
Describing The Data Into Codes And Themes	Describe Personal Experiences Through Epoche Describe The Essence Of The Phenomenon
Classifying The Data Into Codes And Themes	Develop Significant Statements Group Statements Into Meaning Units Develop A Textural Description "What Happened"
Interpreting The Data	Develop A Structural Description, "How" The Phenomenon Was Experienced Develop The "Essence"
Representing, Visualizing The Data	Present Narration Of The Essence Of The Experience; In Tables, Figures, Or Discussion

(Source: Creswell, 2013:190-191)

## Result And Discussion

Establishing A Close Relationship With Plha Takes Time And Requires Strategy. As A Group With Stigma In The Society, People Living With Plha Are Quite Closed. Therefore, The Researcher Carefully Collected The Data So As Not To Offend The Participants. Informal Indonesian Language Was Employed In The Process.

The Research Involved 13 Participants Consisting Of 9 Women And 4 Men As Recorded In Table 1. The Participants Were Purposively Selected With Criteria Of Men Or Women Who Had Had Or Were In Wedlock And Diagnosed With Hiv/Aids Minimum 6 Months Before Interview.

The Researcher Team Performed In-Depth Interview In A Café In Kebumen Regency. The Café Was Chosen In Consideration Of Creating A Relaxed Atmosphere For The Participants To Feel Comfortable And Tell Their Experience As People Living With Hiv/Aids Freely.

The Research Also Intended To Explore Plha's Openness To Their Family And People In Their Environment, Including Regarding Their Sexual Desire. Therefore, For The Participants To Be Open, The Interview Was Conducted By Researcher Of The Same Sex As The Participants. Interview With Female Participants Was Conducted By Female Researcher, Similarly, Interview With Male Participants Was Conducted By Male Researcher.

## Research Informants' Profiles

No	Name	Sex	Age	Year Declared Positive Hiv/Aids	Marital Status	Employment
1	Rr	P	25	2012	Married	Social Worker
2	Sk	P	29	2012	Widow	Housewife
3	Kd	P	31	2014	Married	Social Worker
4	Rt	P	44	2017	Widow	Merchant
5	Rs	P	56	2014	Widow	Merchant
6	Mm	P	47	2016	Married	Merchant
7	Rl	P	25	2017	Widow	Housewife
8	Sw	P	53	2013	Widow	Merchant
9	Ms	P	38	2015	Married	Housewife
10	Mj	L	50	2014	Married	Driver
11	Ks	L	50	2018	Married	Unemployed
12	Kr	L	30	2018	Married	Farmer
13	Tr	L	27	2013	Married	Construction Worker

According To Table 1, The Youngest Participant Was 25 Years Old And The Oldest Was 56 Years Old. The Years The Participants Were Declared Positive Hiv/Aids Also Vary, In Which The First Was 2012 And The Newest Was 2018. From The Result Of Observation During Interview, The Researcher Found That The Participants Who Had Long Had Hiv/Aids Tended To Be More Relaxed And Open During Interview Than Those Just Declared Having Infected By Hiv/Aids For Only 1 Year.

Sexuality According To The World Health Organization (Who) Is The Central Aspect Of Human Life, Covering Sex, Gender Identity And Role, Sexual Orientation, Eroticism, Happiness, Intimacy And Reproduction. His Paper Focuses On Discussion On Plha's Communication With Their Partner Regarding Intimacy And Reproduction.

Intimacy Is A Multifaceted Concept Which Covers At Least Seven Aspects, Namely: Knowledge, Interdependence, Concern, Trust, Responsiveness, Togetherness And Commitment (Miller, 2015). A Romantic Relationship Is Deemed Intimate When They Know Each Other. Married People Living With Hiv/Aids Are Commonly Open To Their Partner For The Purpose Of Taking Care Of Each Other, Although They Acknowledge That When They Just Learn Of The Hiv/Aids Status, Their Heart Was Broken And There Are Anger And Disappointment In Their Partner. The Partner's Anger Which Is Expected To Be The Cause Of Him/Her Getting Infected By Hiv/Aids Does Not Last Long Since They Are Soon Aware That They Need Each Other Even More Than Before, Like The Story Told By Mm:

"I Just Want To Die That I'm Ashamed To Have This Disease. I Feel Just Like A Scumbag, Nasty. But My Husband Said, One's Life-Death Fate Has Been Determined By God...And I Get Used To It After A Long Time. Like When My Husband Said Every Day "Don't Think Too Hard About It, Just Let's Get Relaxed, Just Enjoy It". We Always Went To

The Town Square When We're At Home, Or To Pengandaran, He Always Made Me Happy. He Always Called Me Through Voice And Video Calls And Said "Good Night, Dear" Hahaha And I Said "We're Just Like Teens", And He Said "Not Only Teens Can Do It". May Be He Wanted To Make Me Happy Hehehe. I Did Not Always Have To Have Intercourse With Him. He Said "Let's Just Be Like Brother And Sister".

Likening Husband-Wife Relationship To That Of Brother-Sister, The Participant Told That After They Got Infected By Hiv/Aids, Their Intensity Of Sexual Intercourse Decreased. Sexual Intercourse Was No Longer A Priority Since What Was Important For Them Was To Have Someone To Share Joy And Sorrow As A Group Of Society With Stigma. A Relationship Like That Of Brother-Sister Means Taking Care Of And Protecting Each Other. The Participant And Her Partner Reminded Each Other Of Taking Medicine And Took Care Of Each Other When One Of Them Got Sick.

The Theme On Sexuality Often Discussed By Plha Couples Is Reproduction, Both Keeping From Having Child And, Otherwise, Wishing To Have One. For Plha Who Do Not Plan For Pregnancy, Using Condom During Sexual Intercourse Is A Necessity. Although The Two Are Of Plha Status, But To Keep Their Health Condition, Using Condom Is Mandatory. From The Research Conducted, It Is Female Participants Who Reminded Their Partner To Use Condom. Various Methods Were Used For Their Partner To Use Condom, From Persuading To Threatening Him Not To Have Sexual Intercourse In Case Of Not Using Condom.

More Complex Problems Arose With Plha Who Wished To Have Child, From Discussing Preparation For Pregnancy Which Might Be At Risk, Delivery Through Caesarean Surgery, Preparing Infant Without Breastfeeding And Possible Questions Arising From Big Family And Neighbors Regarding Different Treatment To The Infant And Mother Who Was One Of Plha. Despite The Many Risks Faced, But Plha Couples Who Were Still Productive, The Presence Of Child Remained Something Hoped And Attempted For, Like What Ms Told The Author:

"We're In A Program To Have A Child, We're Married, Despite Being Sick, We Still Wish To Have Child. That Is The Reason, So We Decide Not To Use Condom During Intercourse".

## **Conclusion**

The Plha Couples In The Research Define Their Relationship With Their Partner As That Of Taking Care Of And Protecting Each Other For The Rest Of Their Life. Sexual Intercourse Is No Longer A Priority. The Intimacy Built Between Plha Couple Is No Longer Based On Sexual Intercourse. The Willingness To Accompany Each Other Amidst The Stigma For Plha Makes Plha Couple's Relationship Get Stronger.

Weak Physical Condition Is Not A Constraint For Plha Of Productive Age To Wish And Attempt For Having Child. Discussion With Partner Of Mutually Plha Status Concerning Preparation For Pregnancy, Delivery Through Caesarean Surgery And Possible Identity As Plha Will Be Open, Making Plha's Romantic Relationship Gets More Intimate Because Of Developing Sense Of Mutual Dependence, Togetherness In Joy And Sorrow.

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