

## The Experiences of HIV-serodiscordant Couples at the Perinatal HIV Research Unit in Soweto, South Africa

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**KEYWORDS** Couples. Diagnoses. Heterosexual. HIV-serodiscordant

**ABSTRACT** The incidence of HIV-sero-discordancy among heterosexual couples is estimated between 30 to 50%. This poses great risk to increased spread of HIV as seronegative partners in a sero-discordant relationship have higher risk of HIV infection compared to negative serocordant couples. This paper reports on the experiences of HIV sero-discordant couples at the Perinatal HIV Research unit in Gauteng Province, South Africa. A qualitative approach was adopted, underpinned by interpretative phenomenological analysis. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews of seven couples (N=14). The data were thematically analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis framework. Three superordinate themes emerged as the experiences of couples after receiving HIV sero-discordant diagnosis namely: psychosomatic responses to HIV serodiscordant results, Impact of serodiscordancy on the couples' relationship and support for serodiscordant couples. The main source of the negative experiences were mainly indicating inadequate information and counselling offered to serodiscordant couples after receiving serodiscordant diagnosis. The findings of this study have both practice and policy development implications. Recommendations have been put forward for development of contextual relevant HIV Serodiscordant Couple Counselling and Support guidelines focusing on enhancing knowledge and skills of health care professionals responsible for counselling and supporting HIV sero-discordant couples.