

Living with HIV

HOW I TREAT MYSELF

Told by Diputo Lety
to Elsa Oliveira

I became infected with HIV as a result of a rape. In 2004, I was coughing and losing a lot of weight, so I decided to go to the Sex Worker Project to get tested for sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). The Sex Worker Project is a health clinic for sex workers run by Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute, located in Hillbrow, an inner-city suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa. Since the clinic started in 1997, sex workers have had a safe place to go for health treatments and preventive health exams. It was during this particular visit that I found out that I was HIV-positive. When the nurse at the clinic told me about my status she announced it to me in the hallway, in front of everyone. I felt angry and embarrassed that she did this, and at the time I did not realise that I could report her. Fortunately, my experiences with health-care services have improved after this!

I did not know anything about what it meant to be HIV-positive. I did not know what I needed to do to take care of myself. All I remember was that I felt a lot of fear and that I was reluctant to start anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment. When I look back, I can say that being humiliated in front of people at the clinic did not help me to want to learn more about my treatment options. Initially, I hesitated to start anti-retroviral treatment because I heard from friends that it made people very sick, so instead I took vitamins and tried to eat lots of fruits and vegetables.

In 2008, I became a peer educator with Sisonke Sex Worker Movement, an organisation located in Hillbrow. As a peer educator, I helped educate other sex workers about preventing STIs and HIV and encouraged them to come to Sisonke for support services. Sisonke is a sex-worker led movement that aims to unite and advocate for sex workers and improve their living and working conditions. During this time as a peer educator, I began to learn more about HIV and I realised that my life was not over because of my health status. I learned that I could be healthy and live a long life.



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In 2009, I began ARV treatment. I was ready. Because of the support services of Sisonke, the caring nursing staff at the Sex Worker Project and my work as a peer educator, the stigma of being HIV-positive was replaced by my desire to live a healthy life.

Although my family does not know that I am a sex worker or how I contracted HIV, they are very supportive of me as a woman living with HIV. Both of my parents are hospice workers with people living with HIV, so they understand what it means to be HIV-positive better than a lot of people. They really encourage me to stay healthy and take my ARV treatment. In fact, they call me everyday to remind me to take my ARVs. This kind of support is wonderful, and I feel blessed to have them in my life. I think that it would be much harder if my family were not supportive. When I am not feeling well I go back to my rural home located outside of Pretoria, South Africa, so that I can rest and recuperate, and this makes a big difference in my life. My spirits are high because of their love and encouragement.

As a sex worker, I make sure that I am protected and protect my clients by wearing condoms. After all, *My Body is My Business!* When there are clients that don't want to wear a condom I use a female condom. Many clients do not know about STIs, so when I see that one of them has an STI, I encourage him to go to the clinic to get tested. Sometimes they tell me that they are afraid, and other times they tell me that they don't care about their health. I myself have gone with clients to the clinic so that they can get tested for HIV and STIs. I support them by accompanying them to the clinic because I know from experience that it is not easy to go alone.

I have been taking ARVs for two years now, and while at times the side-effects

are hard to deal with, I take them anyway. I know that they are helping me to stay healthy and strong. I continue to eat healthily and make sure that I get enough rest because I know that all of these efforts help me, my body, and my treatment to work more effectively. I continue to educate other sex workers about health and human-rights issues and why it is so important for sex work to be decriminalised. Many sex workers are afraid to get tested because the stigma of being a sex worker is so high and because they are scared that health-care workers may discriminate against them. As a peer educator, a sex worker and a woman living with HIV I have the opportunity to challenge some of the myths of HIV by sharing my personal story and telling others, specifically sex workers, that they should not be afraid to test for HIV and to seek treatment.

It is my hope that my story serves as an example of the ways in which sex workers are supporting one another and uniting. It is my wish that it positively impacts social and political change for sex workers and that more sensitive and non-judgmental health services will be rolled out in South Africa.

About the authors

Elsa Oliveira met Diputo Lety in 2010 during a participatory photo project called *Working the City: Experiences of Migrant Women in Inner-City Johannesburg*. Market Photo Workshop, Sisonke Sex Worker Movement and the African Centre for Migration and Society at Wits University, where Elsa is a researcher, collaborated on this project. Visit workingthecity.wordpress.com

Contact: elsa.alexandra.oliveira@gmail.com

Note

A slightly different version of this article appeared in *Equal Treatment*, the magazine of the Treatment Action Campaign in June 2011.

与艾滋病毒共存

我如何善待自己



Diputo Lety讲述, Elsa Oliveira整理

因为被强奸，我感染了艾滋病。2004年，我开始剧烈地咳嗽，体重急剧下降。我决定去性工作者项目进行性传播疾病检测。性工作者项目是由生殖健康和艾滋病研究所下属的为性工作者提供健康服务的诊所，坐落在南非约翰内斯堡郊区内城的Hillbrow区。自从1997年诊所成立之后，性工作者开始有了一个安全的地方来获得检测和治疗服务。就是这次去诊所检测，我发现我是艾滋病阳性。当时诊所的护士是在走廊里，在所有人面前，告知我的感染状况的。我感到很愤怒，也很窘迫，但当时我不知道我可以对她进行申诉。幸运的是，在这次尴尬的经历之后，我和医疗系统打交道的经验就改善了！

我当时不知道艾滋病阳性意味着什么。我不知道怎么照顾自己。我所记得的是，我感到极端的恐惧，不愿意开始抗病毒治疗。当我回头再看时，我敢说，在众人面前被羞辱，让我根本就不想了解我所面临的治疗选择。起初，我不愿意开始抗病毒药物治疗，因为我听朋友说服药会让人更加不适，所以我开始吃维生素，吃很多蔬菜和水果。

2008年，我成为Sisonke性工作者运动的一名同伴教育员。这是一个坐落在Hillbrow的组织。作为一名同伴教育员，我帮助教育其他性工作者如何预防艾滋病和性病，并鼓励他们到Sisonke获得这些服务。Sisonke是一个由性工作者领导的运动，旨在团结性工作者，为性工作者进行倡导，改善他们的生活和工作条件。在当同伴教育员期间，我开始更多地了解艾滋病，我意识到我的生活不会因为感染艾滋病而终止，我可以健康长寿地活着。

2009年，我开始了抗病毒药物治疗。我准备好了。因为Sisonke提供的支持服务，性工作者项目的护理人员，以及我所开展的同伴教育工作，感染艾滋病的耻辱感被健康生活的强烈愿望所取代。

尽管我的家人并不知道我是一名性工作者，也不知道我是如何感染艾滋病的，但他们对于我作为一名女性感染者，提供了很多支持。我的父母都是救济院的工作人员，所以他们比其他人更加了解感染艾滋病是怎么回事。他们始终鼓励我保持健康，让我开始抗病毒治疗。事实上，他们每天都给我打电话提醒我吃药。这样的支持和鼓励是非常好的，而且我觉得有他们在我的生活里，很幸福。我想如果我的家人不给我提供这些支持，这个过程对我来说将是非常艰难的。当我觉得不舒服

的时候，我就回到位于南非比勒陀利亚的农村老家，这样我就可以休息和休养。这使得我的生活有很大的不同。因为他们的爱和鼓励，我的精神状态很积极。

作为一名性工作者，我要使用安全套，以保护我自己，并保护顾客。毕竟，我的身体是我的生意！当有顾客不愿意戴安全套时，我会使用女用安全套。很多客人不了解性病，所以当我看到有人感染了性病时，就会鼓励他去诊所进行检测。有人会告诉我他很害怕，也有人告诉我他不关心自己的健康状况。我会和客人一起去诊所，这样他们就能够获得艾滋病和性病检测。我通过陪伴他们给他们提供支持，因为我从我的经验中知道，自己一个人单独去，是很不容易的。

我已经服用抗病毒药物两年了，尽管有些时候副作用让人很难受，我还是坚持服用。我知道这些药会帮助我保持健康和强壮。我继续保持健康的饮食和足够的休息，因为这些都能让我和我的身体保持好的状态，让治疗更加有效。我继续向其他性工作者宣传健康和人权问题，以及为什么性工作去刑事化这么重要。很多性工作者很害怕去检测，因

为性工作所担负的耻辱如此沉重，他们担心医务人员会歧视他们。作为一名同伴教育员，一名性工作者，以及一名女性感染者，我有机会挑战人们对艾滋病的一些误解，通过分享我个人的故事，告诉人们，特别是性工作者，他们不应该害怕艾滋病检测和治疗。

我希望我的故事能够让人们了解，性工作者是可以互相支持和团结的。我希望这能够积极地影响社会和政治改变，让南非能够出现更多面向性工作者的、带有文化敏感性、非歧视的医疗服务。

关于作者

2010年，Elsa Oliveira 和 Diputo Lety 在“在这个城市工作：约翰内斯堡内城女性流动工作者的经验”展览中认识。这是一个参与式的影像项目。市场影像工作坊是Sisoke性工作者运动和南非金山大学非洲流动人口中心共同合作的项目，Elsa为该项目的研究员。请访问项目网站：workingthecity.wordpress.com。

联系：elsa.alexandra.oliveira@gmail.com

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