

POSTER 83

GENDER, AGING & ACTIVITY IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This study explores how older persons in rural South Africa, a context with both high HIV-prevalence and an increasing burden of non-communicable disease, define what it means to be healthy and sick. We examine how older persons perceive the meaning of being healthy or sick and who they compare their own health with. We also examine how older men and women's physical and mental health affect their daily activities and occupations. The Aging & Meaning of Health study was conducted in the MRC/Wits Rural Health and Health Transitions Unit (Agincourt). Findings from 16 semi-structured interviews (8 men, 8 women aged 50 and older) suggest that gender role differences condition values of health and illness, and how it affects activities of daily living and household roles. Gender specific interventions are necessary to adapt the environment and diminish barriers to maximize older persons' ability to perform culturally appropriate roles and age successfully.