

Abstract

Interest in medication-taking as a social behaviour is growing. Drawing on qualitative data, this study interrogates beliefs and practices related to antiretroviral therapy (ART) use among urban poor Kenyan people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). Responding PLWHA relied on a range of ingenious strategies to remember to take their medications but did not necessarily perceive compliance with medical instructions as key to treatment efficacy. They also believed that compliance can even hurt some patients. PLWHA relied on both compliance and non-compliance to seek social acceptance, maintain a reputation of being healthy, dispel rumours about one's status, and minimise economic vulnerability. Compliance was further used to mark gratitude to supportive caregivers and providers, and non-compliance to appraise the efficacy of other treatments which promise permanent cure. The medication-taking practices of poor Kenyan PLWHA reflect their struggles with deprived livelihoods and stigma.